



The Pink Anthology

ARTHUR W. PINK

The A.W. PINK ANTHOLOGY

by Arthur W. Pink (1886-1952)

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Evangelistic Tracts

Is Christ Your Lord?

We do not ask: Is Christ your “Savior”?—but is He, really and truly, your **Lord**? If He is not your Lord, then He is most certainly not your “Savior.” Those who have not received Christ Jesus as their “Lord” and yet suppose Him to be their “Savior,” are deluded—and their hope rests on a foundation of sand. Multitudes are deceived on this vital point, and therefore, if the reader values his or her soul, we implore you to give a most careful reading to this little tract.

When we ask, is Christ your Lord? we do not inquire, Do you believe in the Godhead of Jesus of Nazareth? The demons do that (Mat 8:28-29) and yet perish notwithstanding! You may be firmly convinced of the deity of Christ, and yet be in your sins. You may speak of Him with the utmost reverence, accord Him, His divine titles in your prayers—and yet be unsaved. You may abominate those who traduce His person and deny His divinity, and yet have no spiritual love for Him at all.

When we ask, Is Christ your Lord, we mean, does He in very deed occupy the throne of your heart, and does He actually *rule* over your life? “We have turned everyone to his *own* way” (Isa 53:6) describes the course which we all follow by nature. Before conversion every soul lives to please self. Of old it was written, “every man did that which was right in his own eyes,” and why? “In those days there was no King in Israel” (Jdg 21:25). Ah! that is the point we desire to make clear to the reader. Until Christ becomes your King (1Ti 1:17; Rev 15:3), until you bow to His scepter, until His will becomes the rule of your life, *self* dominates, and thus Christ is disowned.

When the Holy Spirit begins His work of grace in a soul, He first convicts of sin. He shows me the real and awful nature of sin. He makes me realize that it is a species of insurrection, a defying of God’s authority, a setting of my will against His. He shows me that in going my “own way” (Isa 53:6), in pleasing myself, I have been fighting against God. As my eyes are opened to see what a lifelong rebel I have been, how indifferent to God’s honor, how unconcerned about His will—I am filled with anguish and horror, and made to marvel that the thrice Holy One has not long since cast me into hell. Reader,

have you ever gone through this experience? If not, there is very grave reason to fear that you are yet spiritually dead!

Conversion, true conversion, saving conversion, is a *turning from sin to God in Christ*. It is a throwing down of the weapons of my warfare against Him, a ceasing to despise and ignore His authority. New Testament conversion is described thus: “Ye turned to God from idols to serve [to be in subjection to, to obey] the living and true God” (1Th 1:9). An “idol” is any object to which we give what is due alone unto God—the supreme place in our affections, the molding influence of our hearts, the dominating power of our lives. Conversion is a right about face, the heart and will repudiating sin, self, and the world. Genuine conversion is always evidenced by “Lord what wilt Thou have me to do?” (Act 9:6); it is an unreserved surrendering of ourselves to His holy will. Have you yielded yourself to Him (Rom 6:13)?

There are many people who would like to be saved from hell, but who do not want to be saved from *self-will*, from having their own way, from a life of (some form of) worldliness. But God will not save them on their terms. To be saved, we must submit to His terms: “Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the Lord [having revolted from Him in Adam], and he will have mercy upon him” (Isa 55:7). Said Christ, “Whosoever he be of you that *forsaketh not all that he hath* [all that is opposed to Me], he *cannot* be my disciple” (Luk 14:33). Men must be turned [by God] “from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God,” before they can “receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified” (Act 26:18).

“As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in him” (Col 2:6). That is an exhortation to Christians, and its force is—Continue as you began. But how had they “began”? By receiving “Christ Jesus *the Lord*,” by surrendering to Him, by subjecting themselves to His will, by ceasing to please themselves. His authority was now owned. His commands now became their rule of life. His love constrained them to a glad and unreserved obedience. They “gave their own selves to the Lord” (2Co 8:5). Have you, my dear reader, done this? Have you? Do the details of your life evidence it? Can those with whom you come into contact see that you are no more living to please self (2Co 5:15)?

Oh my reader, make no mistake upon this point: a conversion which the Holy Spirit produces is a *very radical thing*. It is a miracle of grace. It is the *enthroning* of Christ in the life. And such conversions are rare indeed. Multitudes of people have just sufficient “religion” to make them miserable. They refuse to forsake every known sin, and there is no true peace for any soul until he does. They have never “received Christ Jesus the Lord” (Col 2:6). Had they done so, “the joy of the LORD” would be their strength (Neh 8:10). But the language of their hearts and lives (not their “lips”) is, “we will not have this man to *reign* over us” (Luk 19:14). Is that your case?

The great miracle of grace consists in changing a lawless rebel into a loving and loyal subject. It is a “renewing” of the heart, so that the favored subject of it has come to loathe what he loved, and the things he once found irksome are now winsome (2Co

5:17). He delights “in the law of God after the inward man” (Rom 7:22). He discovers that Christ’s “commandments are not grievous” (1 Jo 5:3), and that “in keeping of them there is great reward” (Psa 19:11). Is this your experience? It would be if you received Christ Jesus THE LORD!

But to receive Christ Jesus the Lord is altogether beyond unaided human power. That is the last which the unrenewed heart wants to do. There must be a supernatural change of heart before there is even the desire for Christ to occupy its throne. And that change, none but God can work (1 Co 12:3). Therefore, “Seek ye the LORD while He may be found” (Isa 55:6). Search for Him with all your heart (Jer 29:13). Reader, you may have been a professing Christian for years past, and you may have been quite sincere in your profession. But if God has condescended to use this tract to show you that you have never really and truly “received Christ Jesus the *Lord*,” if now in your own soul and conscience you realize that SELF has ruled you hitherto, will you not now get down on your knees and confess to God. Confess to Him your self-will, your rebellion against Him, and beg Him to so *work in you* that, without further delay, you may be enabled to yield yourself completely to His will and become His subject, His servant, His loving slave, in deed and in truth? ❧

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The Ordained Gospel

¹³*For the LORD hath chosen Zion; he hath desired it for his habitation.*

¹⁴*This is my rest for ever: here will I dwell; for I have desired it.*

¹⁵*I will abundantly bless her provision: I will satisfy her poor with bread.*

¹⁶*I will also clothe her priests with salvation: and her saints shall shout aloud for joy.*

¹⁷*I have **ordained a lamp** for mine annointed.*—Psalm 132:17

The first part of this Psalm records a series of prayer-petitions; from verse 11 to the close are a number of great and precious promises relating to David and his family in the type, but mainly and ultimately to Christ and His New Testament church in the antitype. Let the reader constantly bear in mind this important principle and fact, namely, that everything in the Old Testament Scriptures typified or represented Gospel or Eternal realities. First, God here promises to fix His residence in the church (vv. 13-14). Then, to bless the provision He makes for her (v. 15), [and] to give her faithful and successful ministers (v. 16). That, however low the interests of Christ on earth may be brought,

even though (like Himself) it may appear a root in a dry place, yet, like a tree well planted in the ground, but sore lopped and hacked by man and Satan, it will sprout again (v. 16).

In our present verse three things are before us. First, the designation which is given unto the Saviour of sinners by the Father: He calls Him “Mine Anointed.” Though despised and rejected of men, though an unbelieving world sees no form nor comeliness in Him, God owns Him as the Prophet, Priest, and King of His church: compare Psalm 89:20-21. Second, the chief agency of God’s ordering for the manifestation of Christ to a lost world: “I have ordained a *lamp* for mine anointed.” This is the Gospel. The use of a lamp is to give light to people in the darkness of the night: so the proclamation of Christ’s glorious person, offices, and work, is a light shining in a dark place, until the day of glory dawns. Third, the sovereign authority by which this Gospel “lamp” is lighted and carried through this dark world: it is “ordained” of God: it is by divine command that His servants preach and spread the light of the Gospel: compare Mark 16:15, 20.

This Gospel “lamp” was first set up in the purpose of God from eternity, in the “counsel of peace” (Zec 6:13; cf. Pro 8:22-23, 31), when the whole plan of salvation through Christ was laid. Second, this “lamp” was first lighted in this lower world immediately after the fall in paradise. When a dark and dismal night of woe had spread itself over our first parents, a gleam of hope then shone out through the promise of Genesis 3:15. Third, the lamp of the Gospel shone prophetically (Gal 3:8) and typically (Heb 4:2) during all the Old Testament period. It shone, as it were, through a veil. Fourth, after the coming of Christ in the flesh, and His resurrection and ascension into heaven, the lamp of Gospel light was brightened and its blessed rays were more widely diffused, but even then (and now) according to the sovereign pleasure of God. To show how much God is concerned about this “lamp” of the everlasting Gospel, we mention several things which He had ordained concerning it.

1. God has appointed those places and parts of the world where the Gospel lamp shall be set up and shine: “The wind bloweth where it listeth...so is every one that is born of the Spirit” (Joh 3:8). It was so in Old Testament times: “He sheweth his word unto Jacob, his statutes and his judgments unto Israel. He hath not dealt so with any nation: and as for his judgments, they have not known them” (Psa 147:19-20). It was so when Christ was upon earth: to His apostles He said, “Go not into the way of the Gentiles, and into any city of the Samaritans enter ye not: But go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel” (Mat 10:5-6). It was so after His ascension: “Now when they had gone throughout Phrygia and the regions of Galatia, and were forbidden of the Holy Spirit to preach the Word in Asia. After they were come to Mysia, they assayed to go into Bithynia, but the Spirit suffered them not” (Act 16:6-7).

That which regulates God in His providential dealings concerning the Gospel—opening doors or shutting them, sending one of His ministers to a place or withdrawing him—is whether or not there be some of those for whom Christ died in that particular locality: for the “sheep” shall hear His voice (Joh 10:16). Where there is no Gospel preaching for a protracted period, it is an indication that none of God’s elect are there.

“Also I have withholden the rain from you, when there were yet three months to the harvests: and I caused it to rain upon one city, and caused it not to rain upon another city: one piece was rained upon, and the piece whereupon it rained not withered” (Amo 4:7). So it is spiritually, and for the reason thus given.

2. God has appointed how long the Gospel lamp shall remain in each place, before it be sent to another part of the earth. He ordered how long it should shine among the Jews, namely, until Christ came. He ordained how long it should shine in each of the seven churches in Asia, before He came and removed His candlestick. So He has decreed where and when the Gospel shall continue in this country. There is probably more real Gospel preaching in China today, than there is in the U.S.A.! Many a church which was once a bright testimony for Christ is so no longer, nor does it know that “Ichabod” (“the glory is departed”) has been written over it (1Sa 4:21). Many a town that formerly was blest with the ministry of a true servant of God is now left desolate.

3. God has appointed which persons should be converted and edified under the Gospel, when He sends it to any nation or congregation. The Most High has not left it to the caprice of His servants nor to the whims of their hearers, what measure of success the proclamation of His truth shall enjoy. No, the Lord holds in His own right hand the instruments which He employs (Rev 1:16), and causes His Word to be either a “savour of death unto death” or “a savour of life unto life” (2Co 2:16). Paul was bidden by the Lord to remain at Corinth, for, said He, “I have much people in this city” (Act 18:10). On the other hand, God suffered him not to go into Bithynia (Act 16:7).

When a servant of God settles in a new place, he knows not who are the particular ones that he has been ordained a blessing unto. His business is to preach the Word to all who will hear him, leaving it with the Spirit to make whatever application He pleases. The election of grace shall obtain eternal life, the rest will be blinded (Romans 11:7). Some will prove to be wayside hearers, others stony-ground hearers, and yet others thorny-ground hearers. Only a few will give evidence that they are good-ground hearers; but that is all in the hands of “the Lord of the harvest.” Nor should we desire it to be otherwise. God is working out His own eternal purpose, and absolute subjection to the Master’s will is what is required of servants. A beam of the Gospel lamp will shine into one heart, when many others are left in nature’s darkness.

*“Why was I made to hear His voice And enter while there’s room?
While others make a wretched choice, And rather starve than come.
‘Twas the same love that spread the feast, Which sweetly forced me in;
Else I had still refused to taste, And perished in my sin.”*

4. God has ordained by what instrument or minister the Gospel lamp shall be brought unto a people or a particular person. Paul was ordained for the Gentiles, Peter for the Jews; but every one of Christ’s servants is guided by the hand of the sovereign Lord to labour in this, that, or the other part of His vineyard. The stars are held in His right hand (Rev 1:16), and He causes them to shine in this or that orb of His church; and, when He pleases, He removes them from one place to another in His kingdom,

where He has other work for them. And when He takes them to heaven, then they that “turn many to righteousness” shall shine “as the stars forever and ever” (Dan 12:3).

It is not by chance of “good luck” (horrible expression for any child of God to use!) that any one is privileged to sit under the ministry of a man of God to whom the Spirit blesses such to his conversion. No, when God works, He works at both ends of the line, making “all things work together for good” unto His own (Rom 8:28). It was sovereign grace that selected the Lord of glory to be the one who should preach the Word of life to the Samaritan adulteress (Joh 4). It was sovereign grace that appointed Philip to be the Spirit’s mouthpiece to the Ethiopian eunuch (Act 8). It was sovereign grace which determined that Peter should give forth the word of salvation to Cornelius and his household (Act 10): Cornelius was a Roman, and Paul (already then saved) was the apostle to the Gentiles, yet Peter (the apostle to the circumcision) was the one sent to him!

5. God has ordained the measure of fruit that each servant of His shall reap from his labours, the degree of success that each Gospel lamp-bearer shall have. He has determined what number of souls should be edified, and which shall be hardened by His light. “So then neither is he that planteth any thing, neither he that watereth; but God that giveth the increase” (1Co 3:7). It is not always the most gifted ministers, nor the most godly, who are the most successful. So far as we can ascertain from the Gospel records, fewer souls were saved under the preaching of Christ Himself than under Peter’s on the day of Pentecost! Why? “Even so, Father: for so it seemed good in thy sight” (Mat 11:26) must be the answer! ❧

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Vile!

“Behold, I am vile.”—Job 40:4

We are rather afraid that its title will deter some from reading this article; we hope it will not be so. True, it does not treat of a popular theme, nay one which is now very rarely heard in the pulpit; nevertheless, it is a scriptural one. Fallen man is “vile,” so vile that it has been rightly said “he is half brute, half devil.” Nor does such a description exceed the truth. Man is “born like a wild ass’s colt” (Job 11:12), and he is “taken captive by the devil at his will” (2Ti 2:26). Perhaps the reader is ready to reply, Ah, that is man in his unregenerate state, but it is far otherwise with the regenerate. From one viewpoint that is true; from another, it is not so.

Did not the Psalmist acknowledge, “So foolish was I, and ignorant: I was a beast before thee” (Psa 73:22)—unteachable, untractable, kicking against God’s providential dealings; not behaving like a man, much less like a saint! Again, did not Agur confess, “Surely I am more brutish than any man” (Pro 30:2). True, we never hear such lamentations as these from those who claim to have received their “Pentecost” or “second blessing,”¹ nor from those who boast they are living “the victorious life.”² But to those who are painfully conscious of the “plague” of their own heart, such words may often describe their case. Only recently we received a letter from a dear brother in Christ, saying “the vanity and corruption that I find within, which refuses to be kept in subjection, is so strong at times that it makes me cry out ‘my wounds [do] stink and are corrupt’ (Psa 38:5).”

Does the reader object against our appropriation of the Psalms and Proverbs, and say, We in this New Testament age occupy much higher ground than those did. Probably you have often been told so by men, but are you sure of it from the Word of God? Listen, then, to the groan of an eminent Christian: “I am carnal, sold under sin” (Rom 7:14). Do you never feel thus, my reader? Then we are sincerely sorry for you.

As to the other part of the description of fallen man, “half devil,” did not Christ say to regenerate Peter, “Get thee behind me, Satan: thou art an offense unto me” (Mat 16:23)? And are there not times when writer and reader fully merit the same reproof? Speaking for myself, I bow my head with shame, and say, Alas there is.

“Behold, I am vile” (Job 40:4). This was not said by Cain in a remorseful moment after his murder of Abel, nor by Judas after he had betrayed the Saviour into the hands of His enemies; instead, it was the utterance of one of whom God said, “There is none like him in the earth, a perfect [sincere] and an upright man, one that feareth God, and escheweth evil” (Job 1:8). Was Job’s language the effect of extreme melancholy, induced by his terrible afflictions? If not, was he justified in using such strong language of self-deprecation?³ If he was, are Christians today warranted in echoing the same?

In order to arrive at the correct answer to the above questions, let us ask another: when was it that Job said, “Behold, I am vile?” Was it when he first received tidings of his heavy losses? No, for then he exclaimed, “the Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord” (1:21). Was it when his friends reasoned with and reproofed him? No, for then he vindicated himself and boasted of his goodness. Then when was it that Job declared “Behold, I am vile”? It was when the Lord appeared to him and gave him a startling revelation of His own wondrous perfections! It was when he stood in

¹ **Pentecost of second blessing** – reference to the error of the Charismatic movement in depending upon sign gifts and religious experiences for their faith.

² **victorious life** – reference to the error in the Keswick movement (the “higher life” movement) of depending upon subjective impressions for their faith.

³ **self-deprecation** – disapproval of one’s self.

the all-penetrating light of God's immaculate holiness and was made to realize something of His mighty power.

Ah, when a soul is truly brought into the presence of the living God, boasting ceases, our comeliness is turned into corruption (Dan 10:8), and we cry, "Woe is me! for I am undone" (Isa 6:5). When God makes to the soul a personal revelation of His wondrous perfections, that individual is effectually convinced of his own wretchedness. The more we are given to discern the ineffable⁴ glory of the Lord, the more will our self-complacency wither. It is in God's light, and in that only, "we see light" (Psa 36:9). When He shines into our understandings and hearts, and brings to light "the hidden things of darkness," we perceive the utter corruption of our nature and are abominable in our own eyes. While we measure ourselves by our fellows, we shall, most likely, think more highly of ourselves than we ought to think (Rom 12:3); but when we measure ourselves by the holy requirements of God's nature, we cry "I am dust and ashes" (Gen 18:27). True repentance changes a man's opinion of himself.

Is, then, a Christian today warranted in saying "Behold, I am vile"? Not as faith views himself united to the One Who is "altogether lovely" (Song 5:16); but as faith discerns, in the light of the Word, what he is by nature, what he is in and of himself, he may. Not that he is to hypocritically adopt such language in order to gain the reputation of great humility; nay, such an utterance is only to be found upon our lips as it is the feeling expression of our hearts: particularly is it to be owned before God, when we come to Him in contrition and in confession. Yet is it also to be acknowledged before the saints, even as the apostle Paul cried publicly, "O wretched man that I am!" (Rom 7:24). It is part of our testimony to own (before those who fear the Lord) what God has revealed to us.

In what ways am I "vile"?

"Behold; I am vile": such is the candid and sorrowful confession of the writer.

1. *I am vile in my imaginations.* O what scum rises to the surface when lusts boil within me. What filthy pictures are visioned in "the chambers of my imagery" (Eze 8:12). What unlawful desires run riot within. Yes, even when engaged in meditating upon the holy things of God, the mind wanders and the fancy becomes engaged with what is foul and fetid. How often does the writer have to acknowledge before God that "from the sole of the foot even unto the head there is no soundness" in him, "but wounds and bruises and putrefying sores" (Isa 1:6). Nightly does he avail himself of that Fountain which has been opened "for sin and for uncleanness" (Zec 13:1).

2. *I am vile in my self-will.* How fretful am I when God blows upon my plans and thwarts my desires. What surgings of rebellion within my wicked breast when God's providences displease. Instead of lying placidly as clay in the Potter's hand (Isa 64:8; Rom 9:21), how often do I act like the restive colt, which rears and kicks, refusing to be held in with bit and bridle, determined to have my own way. Alas, alas, how very little have I learned of Him who was "meek and lowly in heart." Instead of "the flesh" in me being

⁴ **ineffable** – indescribable; incapable of being expressed.

purified, it has putrefied;⁵ instead of its resistance to the spirit weakening, it appears to be stronger each year. O that I had the wings of a dove, that I could fly away from myself (Psa 68:13).

3. *I am vile in my religious pretenses.* How often I am anxious to make “a fair show in the flesh” and be thought highly of by others. What hypocrisies have I been guilty of in seeking to gain a reputation for spirituality. How frequently have I conveyed false impressions to others, making them suppose it was far otherwise within me than was actually the case. What pride and self-righteousness have swayed me. And of what insincerity have I, at times, been guilty of in the pulpit: praying to the ears of the congregation instead of to God, pretending to have liberty when my own spirit was bound, speaking of those things which I had not first felt and handled for myself. Much, very much cause has the writer to take the leper’s place, cover his lips, and cry “Unclean, unclean!” (Lev 13:45).

4. *I am vile in my unbelief.* How often am I still filled with doubts and misgivings. How often do I lean unto my own understanding instead of upon the Lord. How often do I fail to expect from God (Mar 11:24) the things for which I ask Him. When the hour of testing comes, only too frequently are past deliverances forgotten. When troubles assail, instead of looking off unto the things unseen, I am occupied with the difficulties before me. Instead of remembering that with God all things are possible (Mat 19:26), I am ready to say, “Can God furnish a table in the wilderness?” (Psa 78:19). True it is not always thus, for the Holy Spirit graciously keeps alive the faith which He has placed within; but when He ceases to work, and a trial is faced, how often do I give my Master occasion to say, “How is it that ye have no faith?” (Mar 4:40).

Reader, how closely does your experience correspond with the above? Is it true that, “As in water face answereth to face, so the heart of man to man” (Pro 27:19)? Have we been describing some of the symptoms of your diseased heart? Have you ever owned before God “Behold, I am vile”? Do you bear witness to the humbling fact before your brethren and sisters in Christ? It is comparatively easy to utter such words, but do you feel them? Does the realization of this truth make you “blush” (Ezr 9:6) and groan in secret? Have you such a personal and painful sense of your vileness that, often, you feel thoroughly unfit to draw nigh unto a holy God?

If you believe yourself thoroughly unfit to come to God

If so:

1. *You have abundant cause to be thankful to God* that his Holy Spirit has shown you something of your wretched self, that He has not kept you in ignorance of your woe-ful state, that He has not left you in that gross spiritual darkness that enshrouds millions of professing Christians. Ah my stricken brother, if you are groaning over the ocean of corruption within, and feel utterly unworthy to take the sacred name of Christ upon your polluted lips, then you should be unfeignedly thankful that you belong not to that

⁵ **putrefied** – become rotten or decomposed.

great multitude of self-complacent and self-righteous religionists of whom it is written, “They were not at all ashamed, neither could they blush: therefore shall they fall among them that fall: in the time of their visitation they shall be cast down” (Jer 8:12). Much cause have you to praise the God of all grace that He anointed your sin-blinded eyes, and that now, in His sight, you are able to see a little of your hideous deformities, and cry “I am black”⁶ (Song 1:5).

2. You have abundant cause to walk softly before God. Must not the realization of our vileness truly humble us before Him, make us smite upon our breast, and cry “God be merciful to me a sinner!” (Luk 18:13). Yes, such a prayer is as suited to the maturest saint as it was when first convicted of his lost estate, for he is to continue as he began (Col 2:6; Rev 2:5). But alas, how quickly does the apprehension of our vileness leave us! How frequently does pride again dominate us. For this reason we are bidden to, “Look unto the rock whence ye are hewn, and to the hole of the pit whence ye are digged” (Isa 51:1). Beg God to daily show you your vileness that you may walk humbly before Him.

3. You have abundant cause to marvel at the surpassing love of the Triune God towards you. That the Eternal Three should have set Their heart upon such a wretch is indeed the wonder of all wonders. That God the Father should foreknow and foresee every sin of which you would be guilty in thought and word and deed, and yet have loved thee “with an everlasting love” must indeed fill you with astonishment (Jer 31:3). That God the Son should have laid aside the robes of His glory and be made in the likeness of sin’s flesh, in order to redeem one so foul and filthy as me, was truly a love that “passeth knowledge” (Eph 3:19). That God the Holy Spirit should take up His residence and dwell in the heart of one so vile, only proves that where sin abounded grace did much more abound (Rom 5:20). “Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood; and hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father: to him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen” (Rev 1:5-6). ❧

Available in print as a tract from Chapel Library.

Heart of the Saint

In Christendom today there are thousands of professing Christians against whom little or nothing in the way of fault could be found so far as their outward lives are concerned. They live moral, clean, upright, honest lives, while at the same time the state of their hearts is totally neglected. It is not sufficient to bring our outward deportment into harmony with

⁶ **black** – black as in the darkness of sin.

the revealed will of God. He holds us accountable for what goes on inside, and requires us to keep check on the springs of our actions, the motives which inspire, and the principles which regulate us. God requires “truth in the inward parts” (Psa 51:6). Christ has enjoined us to “take heed” to ourselves “lest at any time our hearts be overcharged with surfeiting, and drunkenness, and cares of this life” (Luk 21:34). If I do not look within, how then shall I be able to ascertain whether I possess that poverty of spirit, mourning for unholiness, meekness, hungering and thirsting after righteousness, and purity of heart upon which the Saviour pronounces His benediction (Mat 5:1-8)? We must remember that salvation itself is both subjective and objective, for it consists not only of what Christ did *for* His people, but also what He by the Holy Spirit did *in* them. I have no evidence whatever of my justification apart from my regeneration and sanctification. The one who can say “I am crucified with Christ” (judicially) can also add “Christ liveth in me” (experientially), and living by faith in Him is proof that He “loved me and gave himself for me” (Gal 2:20).

The heart is the center of man's moral nature, of the personality; it equals the whole inner man, it is the fount out of which everything else comes, and is the seat of his thoughts and of his affections and of his will (Gen 6:5). To guard the heart means that we should live to the glory of God in every respect; that that should be the supreme desire of our life, that we desire to know Him, love Him, and serve Him.

If we are to be approved of God, it is by no means sufficient that we make clean the outside of the cup and platter—yet many suppose that that is all that matters. “Cleanse first that which is within” (Mat 23:26) is our Lord's command. This is rarely given any attention these days, or none at all. It is the devil who seeks to persuade people that they are not responsible for the state of their hearts, that it is impossible for them to change them. Such is most agreeable unto those who think to be “carried to heaven on flowery beds of ease.” But no regenerate soul, with God's Word before him, will credit such falsehood. The divine command is plain: “Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life” (Pro 4:23). This is the principal task set before us, for it is at the heart God ever looks, and there can be no pleasing Him while it is unattended to; yea, woe be unto those who disregard it. He who makes no honest endeavor to cast out sinful thoughts and evil imaginations, and who does not mourn over their presence, is a moral leper. He who makes no conscience of the workings of unbelief, the cooling of his affections, the surgings of pride, is a stranger to any work of grace in his soul.

Not only does God bid thee to “keep thy heart,” but He requires that you do it “with all diligence”; that is, that you make it your main concern and constant care. The Hebrew word of “keep” signifies to “guard,” to watch over this heart (that is, the soul or inward man) as a precious treasure of which thieves are ever ready to rob thee. The devotions of your lips and the labors of your hands are unacceptable to the Lord if your heart is not right in His sight. What husband would appreciate the domestic attentions of his wife if he had good reasons to believe that her affections were alienated from him?

God takes note not only of the matter of our actions, but the springs from which they are done and the design of the same. If we become slack and careless in any of these re-

spects, it shows that our love is cooled and that we have become weary of God. The Lord God is He that “pondereth the heart” (Pro 24:12), observing all its motions. He knows whether your alms-deeds are done in order to be seen of men and admired by them, or whether they issue from disinterested benevolence. He knows whether your expressions of good will and love to your brethren are feigned or genuine!

The Bible lays open, as no other book, the turpitude [shameful depravity] and horrid nature of sin as that “abominable thing” which God “hates” (Jer 44:4), and which we are to detest and shun. It never gives the least indulgence or disposition to sin, nor do any of its teachings lead to licentiousness. It sternly condemns sin in all its forms, and makes known the awful curse and wrath of God which are its due. It not only reproves sin in the outward lives of men, but discovers the secret faults of the heart, which is its chief seat. It warns against the first motions, and legislates for the regulating of our spirits, requiring us to keep clean the fountain from which are “the issues of life.” Its promises are made unto holiness, and its blessings bestowed upon “the pure in heart.” The ineffable [that which cannot be expressed] and exalted holiness of the Bible is its chief and peculiar excellence, as it is also the principal reason why it is disliked by the majority of the unregenerate.

The Bible forbids all impure desires and unjust thoughts as well as deeds. It prohibits envy (Pro 23:17), and all forms of selfishness (Rom 15:1). It requires us to “cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, and to perfecting holiness in the fear of God” (2Co 7:1), and bids us to “abstain from all appearance of evil” (1Th 5:22). Heavenly doctrine is to be matched with heavenly character and conduct. Its requirements penetrate into the innermost recesses of the soul, exposing and censuring all the corruptions found there. The law of man goes no farther than “Thou shall not steal,” but that of God “Thou shalt not covet.” The law of man prohibits the act of adultery, but the Law of God reprehends (finds fault with, censures, blames) the looking upon a woman “to lust after her” (Mat 5:28). The law of man says, “Thou shalt not murder,” that of God forbids all ill-will, malice, or hatred (1Jo 3:15). It strikes directly at that which fallen nature most cherishes and craves. “Woe unto you, when all men shall speak well of you” (Luk 6:26). It prohibits the spirit of revenge, enjoins the forgiveness of injuries, and, contrary to the self-righteousness of our hearts, inculcates humility.

Such a task calls for divine aid, hence help and grace need to be earnestly and definitely sought of the Holy Spirit each day. Alas, so many today are just playing with the solemn realities of God, never embracing and making them their own. How about you, reader? Is this true of you? *Selah.* ❧

Available in print as a tract from Chapel Library.

Salvation

Faith's Communication

From the human viewpoint, things are now in a bad state in the industrial and social realms. Sad is it to see so many able-bodied men anxious for work, but unable to obtain employment. But from the spiritual viewpoint, things are in a far worse state in the religious realm. Sad is it to see the anti-Christian cults flourishing on every side; but far more grievous is it, for those who are taught of God, to discover that much of the so-called 'Gospel' which is now being preached in many "fundamentalist churches" and "Gospel halls," is but a Satanic delusion. The devil knows that his captives are quite secure while the grace of God and the finished work of Christ are "faithfully" proclaimed to them, so long as the only way in which sinners receive the saving virtues of the atonement is unfaithfully concealed. Whilst God's peremptory and unchanging demand for repentance is left out, while Christ's own terms of discipleship (i.e. how to become a Christian: Act 11:26) in Luke 14:26-27 and 33 are withheld, and while saving faith is frittered down to a mere act of the will, blind laymen will continue to be led by blind preachers, only for both to fall into the ditch.

Things are far, far worse even in the "orthodox"⁷ sections of Christendom than the majority of God's own children are aware. Things are rotten even at the very foundation, for with the very rare exceptions God's way of salvation is no longer being taught. Tens of thousands are "ever learning" points in prophecy, the meaning of the types, the significance of the numerals, how to divide the "dispensation," who are, nevertheless, "unable to come to the knowledge of the truth" (2Ti 3:7) of salvation itself; "unable" because unwilling to pay the price (Pro 23:23), which is a full surrender to God Himself. So far as the writer understands the present situation, it seems to him that what is needed today is to press upon the serious attention of professing Christians such questions as, when is it God applies to the sinner the virtues of Christ's finished work? What is it which I am called upon to do in order to appropriate to myself the efficacy⁸ of Christ's atonement? What is it which gives me an actual entrance into the good of His redemption?

⁷ **orthodox** – conforming to established doctrines of the faith.

⁸ **efficacy** – power to produce intended results.

1. What Must I Do to Be Saved?

The questions formulated above are only three different ways of framing the same inquiry. Now the popular answer which is being returned to them is, nothing more is required from any sinner than that he simply believe on the Lord Jesus Christ. In the preceding articles of this series (*Studies on Saving Faith*), we have sought to show that such a reply is misleading, inadequate, faulty, and that, because it ignores all the other scriptures which set forth what God requires from the sinner: it leaves out of account God's demand for repentance (with all that involves and includes), and Christ's clearly defined terms of discipleship in Luke 14. To restrict ourselves to any one scripture using that term results in an erroneous conception of it. They who limit their ideas of regeneration to the one figure of the new birth, lapse into serious error upon it. So they who limit their thoughts on how to be saved to the one word "believe," are easily misled. Diligent care needs to be taken to collect all that Scripture teaches on any subject if we are to have a properly balanced and accurate view thereof.

To be more specific: in Romans 10:13 we read, "For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved." Now does this mean that all who have, with their lips, cried unto the Lord, who have in the name of Christ besought God to have mercy on them, been saved by Him? They who reply in the affirmative, are only deceived by the mere sound of words, as the deluded Romanist⁹ is when he contends for Christ's bodily presence in the bread, because He said "this is my body" (Mat 26:26). And how are we to show the papist¹⁰ is misled? Why, by comparing Scripture with Scripture. So, here. The writer well remembers being on a ship in a terrible storm off the coast of Newfoundland. All the hatches were battened down, and for three days no passenger was allowed on the decks. Reports from the stewards were disquieting. Strong men paled. As the winds increased and the ship rolled worse and worse, scores of men and women were heard calling upon the name of the Lord. Did He save them? A day or two later when the weather cleared, those same men and women were drinking, cursing, and card-playing!

Perhaps someone asks, but does not Romans 10:13 say what it means? Certainly it does, but no verse of Scripture yields its meaning to lazy people. Christ Himself tells us that there are many who call Him "Lord," to whom he will say "Depart from me" (Mat 7:22-23). Then what is to be done with Romans 10:13? Why, diligently compare it with all other passages which make known what the sinner must do ere God will save him. If nothing more than the fear of death or horror of hell prompts the sinner to call upon the Lord, he might just as well call upon the trees. The Almighty is not at the beck and call of any rebel, who, when terrified, sues for mercy. "He that turneth away his ear from hearing the law, even his prayer shall be abomination" (Pro 28:9)! "He that covereth his sins shall not prosper: but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy" (Pro

⁹ **Romanist** – a Roman Catholic.

¹⁰ **papist** – a Roman Catholic; a follower of the Pope.

28:13). The only “calling upon His name” which the Lord heeds, is that which issues from a broken, penitent, sin-hating heart, which thirsts after holiness.

The same principle applies to Acts 16:31 and all similar texts: “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved.” To a casual reader, that seems a very simple matter, yet a closer pondering of these words should discover that more is involved than at first sight appears. The apostles did not merely tell the Philippian jailor to “rest on the finished work of Christ,” or “trust in His atoning sacrifice.” Instead, it was a Person that was set before him. Again, it was not simply “Believe on the Savior,” but on “the Lord Jesus Christ.” John 1:12 shows plainly that to “believe” is to “receive,” and to be saved, a sinner must receive One who is not only a Savior but “Lord;” yea, who must be received as “Lord” before He becomes the Savior of that person. And to receive “Christ Jesus the Lord” (Col 2:6) necessarily involves the renouncing of our own sinful lordship, the throwing down of the weapons of our warfare against Him, and the submitting to His yoke and rule. And before any human rebel is brought to do that, a miracle of divine grace has to be wrought within him. And this brings us more immediately to the present aspect of our theme.

2. What Is Saving Faith?

Saving faith is not a native product of the human heart, but is a spiritual grace communicated from on high. “It is the gift of God” (Eph 2:9). It is “of the operation of God” (Col 2:12). It is by “the power of God” (1Co 2:5). A most remarkable passage on this subject is found in Ephesians 1:16-20. There we find the Apostle Paul praying that the saints should have the eyes of their understanding enlightened, that they might know “what is the exceeding greatness of his power to usward, who believe according to the working of his mighty power, which he wrought in Christ when he raised him from the dead.”

Note the strong expressions here used: not merely the power of God, or the greatness of it, but the “exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward.” Note too the standard of comparison: we “believe according to the working of his mighty power which he wrought in Christ when he raised Him from the dead.” God put forth His “mighty power” when He resurrected Christ. There was a mighty power seeking to hinder, even Satan and all his hosts. There was a mighty difficulty to be overcome, even the vanquishing of the grave. There was a mighty result to be achieved, even the bringing to life One who was dead. None but God himself was equal to a miracle so stupendous. Strictly analogous¹¹ is that miracle of grace which issues in saving faith. The devil employs all his arts and power to retain his captive. The sinner is dead in trespasses and sins, and can no more quicken himself than he can create a world. His heart is bound fast with the grave-clothes of worldly and fleshly lusts, and only Omnipotence can raise it into communion with God. Well may every true servant of the Lord emulate the Apostle Paul and pray

¹¹ **analogous** – similar or comparable in certain respects.

earnestly that God will enlighten His people concerning this wonder of wonders, so that instead of attributing their faith to an exercise of their own will, they may freely ascribe all the honor and glory unto Him to Whom alone it justly belongs.

If only the professing Christians of this untoward¹² generation could begin to obtain some adequate conception of the real condition of every man by nature, they might be less inclined to cavil¹³ against the teaching that nothing short of a miracle of grace can ever qualify any sinner to believe unto the saving of his soul. If they could only see that the heart's attitude toward God of the most refined and moral, is not one whit different than that of the most vulgar and vicious; that he who is most kind and benevolent toward his fellow-creatures, has no more real desire after Christ than has the most selfish and brutal—then it would be evident that divine power must operate to change the heart. Divine power was needed to create, but much greater power is required regenerate a soul: creation is only the bringing of something out of nothing, but regeneration is the transforming not only of an unlovely object, but one who resists with all its might the gracious designs of the heavenly Potter.

It is not simply that the Holy Spirit approaches a heart in which there is no love for God, but He finds it filled with enmity against Him, and incapable of being subject to His law (Rom 8:7). True, the individual himself may be quite unconscious of this terrible fact, yes, ready to indignantly deny it. But that is easily accounted for. If he has heard of little or nothing but the love, the grace, the mercy, the goodness of God, it would indeed be surprising if he hated Him. But once the God of Scripture is made known to him in the power of the Spirit; once he is made to realize that God is the Governor of this world, demanding unqualified submission to all His laws; that He is inflexibly just, and “will by no means clear the guilty” (Exo 34:7); that He is sovereign, and loves whom He pleases and hates whom He wills; that so far from being an easy-going, indulgent Creator, who winks at the follies of His creatures, He is ineffably¹⁴ holy, so that His righteous wrath burns against all the workers of iniquity; then will people be conscious of indwelling enmity surging up against Him. And nothing but the almighty power of the Spirit can overcome that enmity and bring any rebel to truly love the God of Holy Writ.

Rightly did Thomas Goodwin the Puritan (1600-1680) say, “A wolf will sooner marry a lamb, or a lamb a wolf, than ever a carnal heart will be subject to the law of God, which was the ancient husband of it—Romans 7:6. It is the turning of one contrary into another. To turn water into wine, there is some kind of symbolizing, yet that is a miracle. But to turn a wolf into a lamb, to turn fire into water, is a yet greater miracle. Between nothing and something there is an infinite distance, but between sin and grace there is a greater distance than can be between nothing and the highest angel in heaven...To destroy the power of sin in a man's soul is as great a work as to take away the guilt of sin. It

¹² **untoward** – unruly or stubborn.

¹³ **cavil** – resort to trivial faultfinding.

¹⁴ **ineffably** – too awesomely wondrous to be expressed in words.

is easier to say to a blind man, See, and to a lame man, Walk, than to say to a man that lies under the power of sin, Live, be holy, for there is that will not be subject.”

3. The Mighty Power of God in Salvation

In 2 Corinthians 10:4 the apostle describes the character of that work in which the true servants of Christ are engaged. It is a conflict with the forces of Satan. The weapons of their warfare are “not carnal” as well might modern soldiers go forth equipped with only wooden swords and paper shields, as preachers think to liberate the devil’s captives by means of human learning, worldly methods, touching anecdotes, attractive singing, etc. No. Their weapons are the “word of God” and “all prayer” (Eph 6:17-18), and even these are only mighty “through God,” that is, by His direct and special blessing of them to particular souls. In what follows, a description is given of wherein the might of God is here seen, namely, in the powerful opposition which it meets with and vanquishes: “to the pulling down of strongholds, Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ.”

Herein lies the power of God when He is pleased to thus put it forth in the saving of a sinner. The heart of that sinner is fortified against Him: it is steeled against His holy demands, His righteous claims. It is determined not to submit to his law, nor to abandon those idols which it prohibits. That haughty rebel has made up his mind that he will not turn away from the delights of this world and the pleasures of sin, and give God the supreme place in his affections. But God has determined to overcome his sinful opposition, and transform him into a loving and loyal subject. The figure here used is that of a besieged town. The heart’s “strongholds,” the reigning power of fleshly and worldly lusts, are “pulled down;” self-will is broken, pride is subdued, and the defiant rebel is made a willing captive to “the obedience of Christ!” “Mighty through God” points to this miracle of grace.

There is one other detail pointed by the analogy drawn in Ephesians 1:19-21 which exemplifies the mighty power of God, namely, “and set him (Christ) at his own right hand in the heavenlies.” The members of Christ’s mystical body are predestined to be conformed to the glorious image of their glorified Head: in measure, now; perfectly, in the Day to come. The ascension of Christ was contrary to nature, being opposed by the law of gravitation. But the power of God overcame that opposition, and translated His resurrected Son bodily into heaven. In like manner, His grace produces in His people that which is contrary to nature, overcoming the opposition of the flesh, and drawing their hearts unto things above. How we would marvel if we saw a man extend his arms and suddenly leave the earth, souring upward into the sky. Yet still more wonderful is it when we behold the power of the Spirit causing a sinful creature to rise above temptation, worldliness, and sin, and breathe the atmosphere of heaven; when a human soul is made to disdain the things of earth and find its satisfaction in things above.

The historical order in connection with the Head in Ephesians 1:19-20 is also the experimental¹⁵ order with regard to the members of His body. Before setting His Son at His own right hand in the heavenlies, God raised Him from the dead; so, before the Holy Spirit fixes the heart of a sinner upon Christ, he first quickens Him into newness of life. There must be life before there can be sight, believing, or good works performed. One who is physically dead is incapable of doing anything; so he who is spiritually dead is incapable of any spiritual exercises. First the giving of life unto dead Lazarus, and then the removing of the graveclothes which bound him hand and foot. God must regenerate before there can be a “new creature” (2Co 5:17) in Christ Jesus. The washing of a child follows its birth.

When spiritual life has been communicated to the soul, that individual is now able to see things in their true colors. In God’s light he sees light (Psa 36:9). He is now given to perceive (by the Holy Spirit) what a lifelong rebel he has been against his Creator and benefactor: that instead of making God’s will his rule, he has gone his own way; that instead of having before him God’s glory, he has sought only to please and gratify self. Even though he may have been preserved from all the grosser outward forms of wickedness, he now recognizes that he is now a spiritual leper, a vile and polluted creature, utterly unfit to draw near, still less to dwell with, Him who is ineffably holy; and such an apprehension makes him feel that his case is hopeless.

There is a vast difference between hearing or reading of what conviction of sin is, and being made to feel it in the depths of one’s own soul. Multitudes are acquainted with the theory, who are total strangers to the experience of it. One may read of the sad effects of war, and may agree that they are indeed dreadful; but when the enemy is at one’s own door, plundering his goods, firing his home, slaying his dear ones, he is far more sensible of the mercies of war than ever he was (or could be) previously. So an unbeliever may hear of what a dreadful state the sinner is in before God, and how terrible will be the sufferings of hell; but when the Spirit brings home to his own heart its actual condition, and makes him feel the heat of God’s wrath in his own conscience, he is ready to sink with dismay and despair. Reader, do you know anything of such an experience?

Only thus is any soul prepared to truly appreciate Christ. They that are whole need not a physician. The one who has been savingly convicted is made to realize that none but the Lord Jesus can heal one so desperately diseased by sin; that He alone can impart the spiritual health (holiness) which will enable him to run in the way of God’s commandments; that nothing but His precious blood can atone for the sins of the past, and naught but His all-sufficient grace can meet the pressing needs of the present and future. Thus, there must be discerning faith, before there is coming faith. The Father “draws” to the Son (Joh 6:44) by imparting to the mind a deep realization of one’s desperate need of Christ, by giving to the heart a real sense of the inestimable worth of Him, and by causing the will to receive Him on His own terms. ❧

¹⁵ **experimental** – experiential; understood by experience.

The Narrow Way

“Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it.”—Matthew 7:13-14

The second half of Matthew 7 forms the applicatory part of that most important discourse of our Lord's, known as “the Sermon on the Mount.” One leading design of the Sermon was to show the spiritual nature and wide extent of that obedience which characterizes the true subjects of Christ's kingdom, and which obedience is absolutely necessary for the enjoyment of that ultimate state of blessedness which divine grace has provided for them. As the Prophet of God, Christ made known that the righteousness which obtains in His kingdom greatly exceeds the “righteousness of the scribes and the Pharisees” (Mat 5:20).

Now the Jews imagined that they were all of them the subjects of the Messiah's kingdom; that by virtue of their descent from Abraham, they were the rightful heirs of it; that the “righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees” (that system of religious and moral duty taught by them) met all the requirements of God's law. But this delusion the Lord Jesus here exposed. Fleshly descent from Abraham could not give title unto a spiritual kingdom: that which was merely natural was no qualification for the supernatural realm. Only they were accounted the true children of Abraham who had his faith (Rom 4:16), who did his works (Joh 8:39), and who were united to Christ (Gal 3:29).

In the Sermon on the Mount the Lord delineated the inward state of those who belonged to His spiritual kingdom (5:4-11); described the outward conduct by which they might be identified (5:13-16); expounded the personal righteousness which God's justice demanded (5:17-28); and defined that utter repudiation of sin which he required from His people (5:29-30). So high are the demands of the thrice holy One, so uncompromising are the requirements of His ineffable character, that none can dwell with him eternally who do not in time, loathe, resist, and turn from all that is repulsive to His pure eye. Nothing short of the complete denying of self, the abandoning of the dearest idol, the forsaking of the most cherished sinful course—figuratively represented under the cutting off of a right hand and the plucking out of a right eye—is what He claims from every one who would have communion with Himself.

Such plain and pointed declarations of Christ must have seemed “hard sayings” to the multitudes who listened to Him; such piercing and flesh-withering demands would probably cause many of his Jewish hearers to think within themselves, “Who then can be saved? This is indeed a strait gate and a narrow way.” Anticipating their secret objections, the Lord plainly declared that the Gate unto salvation is “strait” and the way which leadeth unto life is “narrow;” yet, He went on to point out, it is your wisdom, your interest, your duty to enter that “gate” and walk that “way.” He acknowledged and faithfully warned them that there was a “wide gate” soliciting their entrance, and a “broad road” inviting them to walk therein; but that gate leads to perdition, that road ends in hell.

The “strait gate” is the only gate to “life,” the “narrow way” is the only one which conducts to heaven. Few indeed find it, few have the least inclination for it; but that very fact ought only to provide an additional incentive to my giving all diligence to enter therein. In the verses which are now to be before us, Christ defined and described the way of salvation, though we (sorrowfully) admit that modern evangelists (?) rarely expound it. What we shall now endeavor to set forth is very different from what most have been taught, but you reject it at your peril. We repeat, that in that passage we are about to consider, He who was Truth incarnate made known the only way of escaping perdition and securing heaven, namely, by entering the “strait gate” and treading the “narrow way.”

1. The Strait Gate

The Greek word for “strait” signifies restrained or “narrow” and is so rendered in the R.V. Now a “gate” serves two purposes: it lets in and it shuts out. All who enter this narrow gate gain admittance to that “way” which “leadeth unto life;” but all who enter not by this narrow gate, are eternally barred from God’s presence. The second use of this gate is solemnly illustrated at the close of the parable of the virgins. There, our Lord pictures the foolish ones as being without the necessary “oil” (the work of the Spirit in the heart), and while they went to buy it, the Bridegroom came, and “the door was shut” (Mat 25:10); and though they then besought him to open it to them, He answered “I know you not.”

What is denoted by this figure of the “narrow gate?” We believe the reference is to the searching and solemn teaching of Him who is Truth incarnate. It is only as the heart bows to the righteousness of God’s claims and demands upon us as set forth by His Son, that any soul can enter that path which alone leads to Him. While the heart is rebellious against Him there can be no approach to Him, for—“Can two walk together except they be agreed?” (Amo 3:3). It is true, blessedly and gloriously true, that Christ Himself is “the door” (John 10:9), and He is so in a threefold way, according to the three principal functions of His mediatorial office. He is “the door” into God’s presence as the Prophet, the Priest, and the King.

Now it is only as Christ is truly received as God’s authoritative Prophet, only as His holy teachings are really accepted by a contrite heart, that any one is prepared to saving-

ly welcome Him as Priest. Christ is the “way” and “the truth” before he is the “life” (Joh 14:6), as he is “first King of righteousness, and after that, ...also King of peace” (Heb 7:2). In other words, His cleansing blood is only available for those who are willing to throw down the weapons of their warfare against God, and surrender themselves to His holy rule. The wicked must forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts, if he is to be pardoned by God (Isa 55:7); and this is only another way of saying that Christ must be received as Prophet, before he is embraced as Priest.

Why is this gate a “narrow” one? For at least three reasons. *First*, because of sin. “The wicked shall be turned into hell, all the nations that forget God” (Psa 9:17)—the gate of heaven is far too narrow to admit such characters. The New Testament plainly affirms the same fact: “For this ye know, that no whoremonger, nor unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, hath any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God. Let no man deceive you with vain words: for because of these things cometh the wrath of God upon the children of disobedience. Be not ye therefore partakers with them” (Eph 5:5-7). *Second*, because of the Law. There are two principal errors about the Law, and I know not which is the more dangerous and disastrous: that one can earn heaven by obeying it; that one may enter heaven without that personal and practical godliness which the Law requires. “Follow peace with all, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord” (Heb 12:14). Where there is not this personal conformity to the will of God, the strong hand of the Law will close the door of heaven. *Third*, because none can take the world along with him: this gate is far too “narrow” to admit those who love the world.

What is meant by “entering” this narrow gate? *First*, the acceptance of those teachings of truth, of duty, of happiness, which were unfolded by Christ; the honest and actual receiving into the heart of His holy, searching, flesh-withering instructions. Acceptance such as a person, with great difficulty, forcing his way through a circumscribed entrance. I say “with great difficulty,” for Christ’s precepts and commandments are, to the last degree, unpalatable to an unrenewed heart, and cannot be willingly and gladly received without a rigid denial of self and relinquishment of sinful pleasures, pursuits, and interests. Christ has plainly warned us that it is impossible for a man to serve two masters. Self must be repudiated, and Christ received as “the Lord” (Col 2:6), or He will not save us.

What is meant by “entering” this narrow gate? *Second*, a deliberate abandoning of the broad road, or the flesh-pleasing mode of life. Until this has been done, there is no salvation possible for any sinner. Christ Himself taught this plainly in Luke 15: the “prodigal” must leave the “far country” before he could journey to the father’s house! The same pointed truth is taught again in James 4:8-10, “Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you. Cleanse your hands, ye sinners; and purify your hearts, ye double minded. Be afflicted and mourn, and weep: let your laughter be turned to mourning, and your joy to heaviness. Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and he shall lift you up.”

Ah, my friend, to really and actually enter this “narrow gate” is no easy matter. For that reason the Lord bade the people “Labour not for the meat which perisheth, but for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life, which the Son of man shall give unto you” (Joh 6:27). Those words do not picture salvation as a thing of simple and easy attainment. Ponder also Christ’s emphatic exhortation in Luke 13:24 “Strive to enter in at the strait gate.” That He should utter such a word, clearly implies the great idleness and sloth which characterizes nominal¹⁶ professors, as it also intimates there are formidable difficulties and obstacles to be overcome. Let it be carefully noted that the Greek word for “strive” (“agonizomai”) in Luke 13:24 is the same one that is used in 1 Corinthians 9:25—“And every one that striveth for the mastery is temperate in all things;” and is also rendered “labouring fervently” in Colossians 4:12, and “fight” in 1 Timothy 6:12!

And how are we to “strive” so as to “enter” the narrow gate? The general answer is, “lawfully” (2Ti 2:5); but to particularize: we are to strive by prayer and supplication, diligently seeking deliverance from those things which would bar our entrance. We are to earnestly cry to Christ for help from those foes which are seeking to overcome us. We are to come constantly to the Throne of Grace, that we may there find grace to help us repudiate and turn away with loathing from everything which is abhorred by God, even though it involves our cutting off of a right hand and plucking out of a right eye; and grace to help us do those things which He has commanded. We must be “temperate in all things,” especially those things which the flesh craves and the world loves.

But why is such “striving” necessary? *First*, because Satan is striving to destroy thy soul. “Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour” (1Pe 5:8); therefore must he be resisted “steadfast in the faith.” *Second*, because natural appetites are striving to destroy thee: “Dearly beloved, I beseech you as strangers and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul” (1Pe 2:11). *Third*, because the whole world is arrayed against thee, and if it cannot burn, it will seek to turn thee by alluring promises, Delilah-like guiles, fatal enticements. Unless you overcome the world, the world will overcome you to the eternal destruction of thy soul.

From what has been before us, we may plainly discover why it is that the vast majority of our fellow-men and women, yea, and of professing Christians also, will fail to reach heaven: it is because they prefer sin to holiness, indulging the lusts of the flesh to walking according to the scriptures, self to Christ, the world to God. It is as the Lord Jesus declared—“Men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil” (Joh 3:19). Men refuse to deny self, abandon their idols, and submit to Christ as Lord; and without this, none can take the first step toward heaven!

¹⁶ **nominal** – in name only, not in fact.

2. The Narrow Way

Just as entering the “narrow gate” signifies the heart’s acceptance of Christ’s holy teaching, so to walk along the “narrow way” means for the heart and life to be constantly regulated thereby. Walking along the narrow way denotes a steady perseverance in faith and obedience to the Lord Jesus; overcoming all opposition, rejecting every temptation to forsake the path of fidelity to Him. It is called the “narrow way” because all self-pleasing and self-seeking is shut out. In Genesis 18:19 it is called “the way of the Lord;” in Exodus 13:21, 32:8 “the way;” in 1 Samuel 12:23 “the good and right way;” in Psalm 25:9 “his way;” in Proverbs 4:11 “the way of wisdom;” in Proverbs 8:20 “the way of righteousness;” in Proverbs 10:17 “the way of life;” in Isaiah 35:8 “the way of holiness;” in Jeremiah 6:16 “the good way;” in 2 Peter 2:2 “the way of truth;” in 2 Peter 2:15 “the right way.”

The narrow way must be followed, no matter how much it may militate¹⁷ against my worldly interests. It is right here that the testing point is reached: it is much easier (unto the natural man) and far pleasanter to indulge the flesh and follow our worldly propensities.¹⁸ The broad road, where the flesh is allowed “liberty”—under the pretense of the Christian’s not “being under the law”—is easy, smooth, and attractive; but it ends in “destruction!” Though the “narrow way” leads to life, only *few* tread it. Multitudes make a profession and claim to be saved, but their lives give no evidence that they are “strangers and pilgrims” here, with their “treasure” elsewhere. They are afraid of being thought narrow and peculiar, strict and puritanical. Satan has deceived them: they imagine that they can get to heaven by an easier route than by denying self, taking up their cross daily, and following Christ!

There are multitudes of religionists who are attempting to combine the two “ways,” making the best of both worlds and serving two masters. They wish to gratify self in time and enjoy the happiness of heaven in eternity. Crowds of nominal Christians are deluding themselves into believing that they can do so; but they are terribly deceived. A profession which is not verified by mortifying the deeds of the body in the power of the Spirit (Rom 8:13) is vain. A faith which is not evidenced by complete submission to Christ is only the faith of demons. A love which does not keep Christ’s commandments is an imposition (Joh 14:23). A claim to being a Christian, where there is no real yieldedness to the will of God, is daring presumption. The reason why so few will enter life is because the multitudes are not seeking it in the way of God’s appointing. None seek it aright save those who pass through the narrow gate, and who, despite many discouragements and falls, continue to press forward along the narrow way.

Now notice, carefully, the very next thing which immediately followed our Lord’s reference to the two ways in Matthew 7: “Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves” (Mat 7:15). Why does this come

¹⁷ **militate** – to be directed or operate (against).

¹⁸ **propensities** – inclinations or tendencies.

in next? Who are the “false prophets” against which a serious soul needs to be on his guard? They are those who teach that heaven may be reached without treading the narrow way! They are those who loudly insist that eternal life may be obtained on much easier terms. They come in “sheep’s clothing;” they appear (to undiscerning souls) to exalt Christ, to emphasize His precious blood, to magnify God’s grace. *But* they do not insist upon repentance; they fail to tell their hearers that nothing but a broken heart which hates sin can truly believe in Christ; they declare not that a saving faith is a living one which purifies the heart (Act 15:9) and overcomes the world (1Jo 5:4).

These “false prophets” are known by their “fruits,” the primary reference being to their “converts”—the fruits of their fleshly labours. Their “converts” are on the broad road, which is not the path of open wickedness and vice, but of a religion which pleases the flesh: it is that “way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death” (Pro 14:12). Those who are on this broad road (this way which “seemeth right” to so many), have a head-knowledge of the truth, but they walk not in it. The “narrow way” is bounded by the commandments and precepts of Scripture. The broad road is that path which has broken out beyond the bounds of Scripture. Titus 2:11-12 supplies the test as to which “way” we are in: “For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world.”

3. Objection Answered

Ere closing, let us anticipate and seek to remove an objection. Probably many of you are saying, “I thought Christ was the way to the Father” (Joh 14:6). So He is, but how? *First*, in that He has removed every legal obstacle, and thereby opened a way to heaven for His people. *Second*, in that He has left us an example that we should follow *His* steps. The mere opening of a door does not give me entrance into a house: I must tread the path leading to it, and mount the steps. Christ has, by His life of unreserved obedience to God, shown us the way which leads to heaven: “When he putteth forth his own sheep, he goeth before them, and the sheep follow him” (Joh 10:4). *Third*, in that He is willing and ready to bestow grace and strength to walk therein.

Christ did not come here and die in order to make it unnecessary for me to please and obey God. No indeed: “He died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them” (2Co 5:15). “Who gave himself for our sins, that he might deliver us from this present evil world” (Gal 1:4). “Who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works” (Ti 2:14). Christ came here to “save his people from their sins” (Mat 1:21). And if you are not now delivered from the power of sin, from the deceptions of Satan, from the love of the world, and from the pleasing of self, then you are NOT saved. May it please the God of all grace to add His blessing. ❧

Available in print as a booklet from Chapel Library.

The Prodigal Son

“And not many days after the younger son gathered all together, and took his journey into a far country, and there wasted his substance with riotous living...And when he came to himself, he said...I will arise and go to my father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee...And he arose, and came to his father. But when he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him.”—Luke 15:13, 17-18, 20

1. Introduction

Before we attempt to expound this portion of Scripture in detail, let us first make a few general observations. Who does the “prodigal son” represent? Is it an unregenerate sinner, or a backslidden believer that is in view? There is a division of sentiment upon this point. Personally, we have no doubt whatever that in this part of the parable of the Salvation of the Lost, the Lord Jesus pictures an unregenerate sinner. Our interpretation will proceed along this line, but before we give it, let us first present some proofs that it is not a backslidden believer that is before us.

First, the whole context shows plainly the class that is portrayed throughout the entire chapter. In the first two verses of Luke 15 we are told, “Then drew near unto Him all the publicans and sinners for to hear Him. And the Pharisees and scribes murmured, saying, This man receiveth sinners, and eateth with them.” Here, then, Christ is seen in connection with the lost. It was in answer to this criticism of the Pharisees and scribes that our Savior proceeded to utter the parable which has brought life and peace to countless souls since then. And in this parable the Lord is not warning His disciples against the danger of backsliding, but is vindicating Himself for “receiving sinners.”

That part of the parable which treats of what has been termed “the prodigal son” begins at the eleventh verse, but what we have here and in the verses that follow is only a continuation of what the Lord said as recorded in the previous verses. In these previous verses He depicts a man going after a lost sheep until he finds it; and also a woman who loses one piece of silver, and who sweeps the house and seeks diligently until she finds it. Surely there can be no doubt whatever as to who is figured by the “lost sheep,” and the “lost piece of silver.” Surely it is obvious that these picture an unregenerate soul and not a backslidden believer.

In the third place, the words which the “father” spoke when the wandering son returned furnish another proof that it is a sinner and not an erring saint who is before us. Said he, “Bring forth the best robe, and put it on him” (:22). The “best robe” here speaks of the Robe of Righteousness which each sinner receives when he first comes to Christ.

Had it been a backslidden believer, his need would be to have his feet “washed” (John 13).

Finally, the “father’s” statement concerning his son is proof positive that it is no erring Christian that is here in view. The father said, “For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found” (:24). This is conclusive to all who believe that “the gifts and calling of God are without repentance” (Rom 11:29). Every believer is in present possession of eternal life, which he has received from God as his “gift” (Rom 6:23); and this “gift” is never recalled. If then the believer is in present possession of eternal life he can never die. (See John 8:51). That the father spoke of the returning prodigal as one who “was dead,” and who “was lost” is proof positive that an unregenerate sinner is here in view.

There is only one argument that is of any force against what we have said above, and that we will briefly consider. We are asked to explain how Christ could speak of this wanderer as a son if he represented an unregenerate sinner. Insurmountable as the difficulty appears at first sight it is, nevertheless, capable of simple solution. We answer in a word that this wanderer who came to the “father” was a son by election. He was a son in the purpose of God. If we should be asked to point to a Scripture which justifies such an assertion, where those of God’s elect are termed “sons” before they are actually regenerated, we would at once refer to John 11:51-52: “He prophesied that Jesus should die for that nation; and not for that nation only, but that also He should gather together in one the children of God that were scattered abroad.” Here we are told that the ones who were to definitely benefit from the death of Christ, and who should “be gathered together in one” (that is, into one family), were, at that time “scattered abroad,” nevertheless, they were denominated “the children of God!” Another Scripture which enunciates the same principle is John 10:16 where we find the Savior declaring “And other sheep I have which are not of this fold: them also I must bring:” even before they were brought to Himself the Good Shepherd terms them His sheep.

Before giving a detailed exposition of the closing verses of Luke 15, we would point out that this chapter does not contain three parables, as is commonly supposed, but instead, one parable, in three parts. In verse 3 we are told, “He spake this parable unto them, saying, What man of you having an hundred sheep,” etc. Again, in verse 8 we read how that the Savior continued to say, without any break, “Either what woman having ten pieces of silver, if she lost one piece,” etc. Then in verse 11 it is recorded, “And He said, A certain man had two sons,” etc. This parable as a whole has to do with the salvation of a lost sinner, and much of its beauty is missed by failing to discern its unbroken unity. It gives a beautiful and marvelous picture of the concern of each of the three Persons of the Holy Trinity in the salvation of the lost. In the third part of this parable we are shown a sinner coming into the presence of the father. But in order to appreciate the preciousness of this we must pay careful attention to what precedes.

In the second part of this one parable, we have brought before us, in figurative form, the work of the Holy Spirit, and this, we know, is what precedes the coming of any sin-

ner into the presence of the father. And on what is the work of the Holy Spirit based? The answer is, upon the work of Christ; and that is what we have portrayed in the first part of the parable, where the Shepherd is in view. We pause to notice very briefly a few details in connection with these two things.

In verses 4 to 7 we see the work of Christ as the Good Shepherd. First, He is the One “having an hundred sheep;” He is the One to whom the “sheep” belong—they belong to Him because they were given to Him by the Father. Second, He is the One that is said to “go after that which is lost:” this pictures Christ leaving His home on high and coming down to this earth where His lost sheep were. Third, next we are told that He goes after the lost “until He find it:” this brings us to the Cross—the place of death, for it was there the “sheep” were, and only there could they be found.

Fourth, “And when He hath found it, He layeth it on His shoulders:” this tells of the tender care of the Savior for His own, and also assures us of the safe place which we now have in Him. It is blessed to note that in Isaiah 9:6 where Christ’s future kingship is in view, we are told “The government shall be upon His shoulder,” the singular number being used; whereas it is the plural number when the place which the sheep has is mentioned—shoulder upholds the government of the world, shoulders give double guarantee to our preservation.

Fifth, “He layeth it on His shoulders, rejoicing.” How wondrous is this! We can understand that the sheep should find abundant cause to rejoice over the Shepherd, but that the Savior (the Self-Sufficient One) should have occasion to rejoice in the salvation of poor hell-deserving sinners “passeth knowledge.” Sixth, “And when He cometh home:” this tells of the blessed issue of the Savior’s work and the happy success of the Shepherd’s quest. Notice that heaven is here termed “home”—a figure that will well repay prolonged meditation. Seventh, “And when He cometh home, He calleth together His friends and neighbors, saying unto them, Rejoice with Me; for I have found My sheep which was lost;” how this reveals to us the heart of Christ! Not only does He rejoice over the salvation of the lost, but He will call upon the angels to share His joy.

In verses 8 to 10 we see the work of the Holy Spirit. Notice three things. First, that the “woman” who here prefigures Him, lights a candle, ere she sweeps the house and seeks diligently for that which was lost. How accurate the figure! This is precisely what the Spirit of God does in His operations. He uses a light, and that light is the Lamp of Life, the Word of God—the entrances of the very words of which “giveth light.” In the second place, unlike the work of the Shepherd, which was on the outside, the sphere of the woman’s operation was on the inside: “the house.” So, the external Work of Christ was done for us, but the Work of the Spirit is done in us. In the third place, the gracious patience and blessed perseverance of the Holy Spirit in His divine work within those who by nature are rebels, is here portrayed in the fact that we are told the woman will “seek diligently till she find.” The result of the first part of this parable which portrays the Work of Christ, and of the second part of the parable which depicts the Work of the Holy

Spirit, is brought before us in the third part of the parable which shows us the poor sinner actually coming into the presence of the Father.

This parable then tells us three things about the Godhead: the Shepherd's toil, the Spirit's search, and the hearty welcome which the Father gives to the sinner that comes back to Himself. But this is not all: the striking thing is that we have here a marvelous representation of the mystery of the Holy Trinity. As already pointed out, Luke 15 does not give us three parables, but instead one parable in three parts, and each one of these three parts brings before us separately, each of the three Persons in the Godhead: so that we have here one in three, and three in one.

We are also taught three outstanding things in connection with the sinner. In the first part of the parable he is seen under the figure of a sheep that is lost; this intimates the stupidity of the sinner who, like a lost sheep, is unable to find his way home, and who if he is to be restored must be sought. In the second part of the parable he is seen under the figure of a coin and is lost: here we have an inanimate object, in other words, that which accurately portrays the solemn fact that the sinner is spiritually dead. In the third part of the parable he is seen under the figure of a dissolute son, away in the far country: this gives us a representation of the natural man's moral condition: alienated from God and wayward at heart.

It is the third part of this parable which is now to engage our attention, that part of the parable which views the sinner coming into the presence of God. It is the human side that is now made prominent. Here we are shown the sinner's consciousness of his need: he "began to be in want." Here we are shown the sinner exercising his will: "I will arise." Here we are shown the sinner repenting: "I...will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee, and am no more worthy to be called thy son." But let it be borne in mind that before the sinner does any of these three things God has previously been at work upon him. Let us not forget that in this wonderful and blessed parable the Lord Jesus gives us the divine side first, before He makes mention of the human side. Therefore, let those who desire to "follow His steps" give careful heed to this principle. We shall now consider...

2. The Prodigal Himself

A. He had a "substance" or "portion."

"A certain man had two sons: and the younger of them said to his father, Father, give me the portion of goods that falleth to me. And he divided unto them his living" (:11-12). In addition to our natural endowments or talents, and our time and strength, God has given to every one of His creatures a soul. This soul may be regarded as capital in hand with which to do our trading both for time and eternity. It is a most valuable portion, for it is worth more than "the whole world;" it is worth more than the whole world because it will endure after the world and all its works have been burnt up.

This parable begins by bringing into view the sinner before he goes out into the "far country," or to use the language of the parable, before he "took his journey into a far

country.” It was while in his father’s house that he received his “portion of goods,” and that “he (the father) divided unto them (his) living,” so that the portion received was a living portion. This can only refer to the creature, prior to his birth into this world, receiving from “the Father of spirits” (Heb 12:9) a “living soul.”

B. He “took his journey into a far country” (:13).

The “far country” is the world which is away from God, so far away that “the whole world lieth in the wicked one” (1Jo 5:19). As the result of Adam’s sin man was separated from God, and all of Adam’s descendants enter this world “alienated from the life of God” (Eph 4:18). There is a great gulf between the thrice holy God and the sinful creature which none but Christ can bridge. The sinner is away from God in his heart, in his thoughts, in his ways. How much this explains!

It explains Atheism. Atheism is simply man’s attempt to hide from the discomfiture of God’s acknowledged presence. Men will give you many reasons as to why they are infidels, agnostics, and atheists, but these reasons are, in reality, only so many “excuses” (Luk 14:18): the real reason is that men are determined to get away from the avowed acknowledgment of God.

This explains the general neglect among men of the Bible. They will give you many reasons as to why they do not read it—they cannot find the time, there is much in it they cannot understand, and there are so many conflicting interpretations of its contents, and so they leave it alone. Men esteem the holy Word of God less highly than they do the writings of their fellow sinners. And yet the Scriptures treat of many subjects of profound importance and vital moment: they furnish the only reliable information concerning the origin of man, the nature of man, the purpose of man’s existence, and the life beyond the grave, etc. Impelled by an uneasy conscience many will read a chapter in the Bible now and again, but that is all, and the real reason for this is because the Bible brings man into the presence of God, and that is the very last thing the natural man desires. What a proof is this, then, that he is in “the far country;” that at heart he is away from the Father!

This explains why it is that sinners, as such, have no delight in prayer. Real prayer is a direct speaking to God through the mediation of Christ. It is that which brings us into contact and communion with the Great Invisible. But the sinner has no heart for this. He finds no enjoyment in pouring out his soul to God. If he prays at all, prayer is an irksome task and a mere repetition of words. He had rather do almost anything than pray, and the reason for this is because he wants to keep away from God.

This explains why it is that the sinner has no real delight in the public worship of God. It is true that he may go to church: a vague sense of duty may take him there, or it may be from force of habit acquired through a Christian upbringing, or it may be an uneasy conscience which renders him a punctual attendant. Nor is he always an uninterested hearer. When the preacher delivers his message with oratorical fire and with rhetorical embellishments that are pleasing to the ear, he is not only interested but gratified. But let the preacher forget his rhetoric, let him leave his generalizations—let him

address himself directly to the sinner's conscience, and say, "Thou art the man;" let him be brought into the presence of God and the poor unsaved listener will at once be rendered uneasy, and it is more than doubtful whether he will return any more to hear that preacher.

C. He "wasted his substance with riotous living" (:13).

As pointed out above, "the substance" is the living soul which every man receives from his Creator, and which is to be regarded as capital in hand with which to do his trading both for time and eternity. And here is how the sinner, every sinner, uses the "portion" that he has received from the Father of spirits. He squanders it.

Let it be said emphatically that this "prodigal son" is not merely a representation of some particular class of sinners who are more wicked than their fellows, whose offences against God are more flagrant than the general run of sinners; but instead, the "prodigal son" pictures the course that is followed by every descendant of Adam.

"And there wasted his substance with riotous living." From the hour of his birth the natural man has never cherished a single feeling, exercised a single thought, or performed a single deed that is acceptable to God. So far as eternity is concerned he is spiritually barren: his life is fruitless. But not only has he ignored the claims of God, not only has he neglected the things of God, not only has he failed to love the Lord his God with all his heart, but he has squandered his time, misused his talents, and lived entirely for himself.

D. He encountered "a mighty famine" (:14).

"And when he had spent all, there arose a mighty famine in that land" (verse 14). "That land" is the "far country." It is the world, that world which is away from God, and which, in consequence, "lieth in the wicked one." And in that land there is "a mighty famine" all the while. It is to be noted, however, that we are told, "there arose a mighty famine in that land." It was not so there, always. The famine "arose" when man became separated from God, i.e. at the Fall. The "famine" has reference to the fact that there is nothing whatever in this world that can minister to man's soul.

E. He "began to be in want" (:14).

Here, in the history of a sinner who is saved eventually, is where hope begins. There are many living in this "far country" today where there is "a mighty famine" but, the tragic thing is, that they are unconscious of it. They are satisfied with what they find here. They are sensible of no need which this world fails to meet. It is only after God begins His work upon the soul that the sinner discovers that everything here is only "vanity and vexation of spirit." Happy the one who has reached this point. Happy the one who has begun "to be in want." Happy the one who is conscious of an aching void in his heart, of a yearning in his soul, of a need in his spirit, which the things of this world and the pleasures of sin have failed to satisfy. Such an one is "not far from the kingdom." Nevertheless, the beginning to be "in want" is but the initial experience. There are other experiences, painful ones, to be passed through before the sinner actually comes to God.

Let us follow further the history of “the prodigal son” which so accurately traces the course pursued by each of us.

F. He “went and joined himself to a citizen of that country” (:15).

How true to life! Notice he did not decide at once to return to his father—that did not come until later. Instead of returning to the father, he turned to man for relief, and went to work, for as we read, “he [the citizen of that country] sent...him into his field to feed swine.” Does the Christian reader need an interpreter here? Does not his own past experience supply the key to the meaning of verse 15? The beginning to be “in want” finds its counterpart in the first awakening of the soul, or to use other terms, it corresponds to conviction of sin. And when a soul has been awakened, when it has been convicted of sin, when it has been made conscious of a “want” not yet supplied, what does such an one, invariably, do?

Did you, dear reader, turn at once to the Savior? Not if your experience was anything like that of the writer and the vast majority of other Christians he has talked with. If your experience corresponds in anywise with his and theirs, after you were first awakened you began to attempt to work out a righteousness of your own. You betook yourself to the work of reformation, and to aid you in this you turned to man for counsel and help.

And unless the sovereign grace of God overruled it, instead of seeking help from a real Christian who (if he had intelligence in the things of God) would at once have urged you to “search the Scripture” to discover God’s remedy, you turned to some professing Christian, who in reality was only a “citizen of that country”—the world. And if you turned to such an one, he did for you precisely what we read here in the parable—he sent you “to feed swine.” Allowing Scripture to interpret Scripture, the “swine” here represents professing Christians, who ultimately apostatize (see 2 Peter 2:20-22). The one for whom you went for advice told you that what you needed to do was to “engage in Christian service;” “work for the Lord;” “get busy in helping others”—and this while you were still dead in trespasses and sins! Perhaps you were asked to teach a class of unsaved children in the Sunday School, or to be an officer of a young people’s society (the majority of whom were, probably, like yourself—unsaved), and thus “feed the swine.”

G. He “came to himself” (:17).

“And he would fain have filled his belly with the husks that the swine did eat: and no man gave unto him. And when he came to himself, he said,” etc. (verses 16-17). And again we say, How true to life! What did this joining of himself to a citizen of that country, and this working in the field amount to? What relief did it bring to his hungry soul? Just nothing. All there was for him there were “the husks that the swine did eat.” And what did all your labors as an awakened but unregenerate sinner amount to? What relief did they afford your poor heart? None whatever. All your zeal and sacrifices in your so-called “Christian service” provided you with nothing but “husks,” the same husks that the swine “did eat.” And how pathetic are the words that follow next—“And no man gave

unto him!” Ah! the need of the awakened sinner lies deeper than any “man” can reach unto. It is this lesson that the sinner must next be taught. He must learn to turn away from man and look unto Christ Himself. It is not until he does this that there will be any relief.

“And when he came to himself.” This means that he had recovered his sanity, for previously he was “beside himself”—out of his mind. The Scriptures represent the sinner as suffering from spiritual insanity, and regeneration as the bestowment of a right mind. In Ephesians 4:17-18, the saints of God are exhorted to “walk not as other Gentiles walk in the vanity of their mind, having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart.” Again, in Mark 5 we have in the demoniac a type of the sinner in bondage to Satan, who, when delivered by our Lord, is seen “sitting, and clothed, and in his right mind.” Finally, in 2 Timothy 1:7 the change which the new birth produces is described in the following terms: “For God has not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind.”

Insanity is the lack of capacity to think correctly, and to form proper estimates of ourselves and others. It is a suffering from various forms of hallucination. An unmistakable evidence of insanity is, that the one whose mind is deranged is quite ignorant of the fact, and supposes himself to be all right. What is true in the natural realm has its counterpart in the spiritual. The sinner’s understanding is darkened; his mind is full of strange delusions; he is unable to arrive at correct conclusions; and what is the saddest part of it all is, that he is totally unconscious of his spiritual disease. But when the Holy Spirit of God has worked upon a man, these hallucinations are removed, the darkness is taken away from his understanding and, like the “prodigal,” he “comes to himself.”

H. He said, “I will arise and go to my father” (:18).

It is not until after the sinner has been made to feel “the mighty famine” that exists in the far country, it is not until he has discovered that “no man” can give unto him, and it is not until he has “come to himself,” that he begins to reason aright and remind himself that in his father’s house there is “bread enough and to spare.” And it is only then that he declares “I will arise and go to my father,” which means, it is only then that the will begins to move Godwards. And what is the next thing that we read? Why, that the prodigal not only determines to arise and go to his father, but he announces that he will “say unto him, Father I have sinned against heaven and before thee.” In other words, he is now willing to take the place of a lost sinner before God. That is what repentance is.

I. He is still legalistic.

I will say, “I have sinned against heaven, and before thee, and am no more worthy to be called thy son: make me as one of thy hired servants” (verses 18-19). Applying the language of this to the history of the sinner coming to God, we here reach the point where, though the Holy Spirit has done much for the awakened one—discovering his need, and enlightening his mind, directing his will, and producing conviction—the work

of grace is not yet complete. The sinner is now deeply conscious of his own utter unworthiness, but not yet has he learned of the marvelous grace of God which more than meets his deep need. This comes out in the fact that the highest conception that the mind of the returning “prodigal” rose to was that of being made one of the “hired servants.” How legalistic the mind of man is! How tenaciously he clings to his own performances! How strenuously he will contend for the need of bringing in his own works! A “hired servant” is one who has to work for all he gets.

J. He “arose and came to his father” (:20).

Blessed be His name, God does not cease His patient work within us until this point has been reached. Dull of comprehension though we are, our minds at enmity against Him, our wills essentially opposed to Him, He graciously perseveres with us until our understandings have been enlightened, our enmity has been removed, our wills so subdued that we arise and come to Him.

And what was the reception the prodigal met with? Do you know what portion was meted out to a “prodigal son” under the Law? Read with me the following passage: “If a man have a stubborn and rebellious son, which will not obey the voice of his father, or the voice of his mother, and that, when they have chastened him, will not hearken unto them: then shall his father and his mother lay hold on him, and bring him out unto the elders of his city, and unto the gate of his place; And they shall say unto the elders of his city, This our son is stubborn and rebellious, he will not obey our voice; he is a glutton, and a drunkard. And all the men of his city shall stone him with stones, that he die” (Deu 21:18-21). How then did the father receive this “prodigal”? And this brings us to consider:

3. The Prodigal’s Reception

How many an exercised heart has wondered what sort of a reception he would meet with if he came to God. Blessed it is to ponder the closing portion of the third part of this matchless parable. In expounding the significance of what is recorded of this “prodigal son” as he departed from the “father,” we have seen portrayed the representative experiences of the sinner. As we turn now to the happy sequel, we shall see that what happened to him as he returned to the “father” also pictures the representative experiences of the believer.

“And he arose, and came to his father, But when he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him” (verse 20). How inexpressibly blessed this is! Five things (the number of grace) are here predicated of “his father.” First, when he was yet a great way off his father “saw him.” And what does this tell us? Why, that the father was looking out for him! The father was eagerly waiting for him. And how keen are love’s eyes! Even while he was yet a “great way off” his father saw him. But how solemnly this brings out the distance in which by nature we were from God! Even after the sinner has “come to himself,” and turned his back upon the “far country,” and has set his face homewards, he is “yet a great way off!” Nevertheless,

all praise to His sovereign grace, “But now, in Christ Jesus, ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ” (Eph 2:13).

Second, his father “had compassion.” The “prodigal” must have presented a miserable appearance: he had devoured his living with harlots (:30)—the illicit love for the things of the world, instead of loving God with “all our hearts”—he had suffered the effects of the “mighty famine” (:14), and he had gone out into the fields to “feed swine” (:15). What a pitiable object he must have been! Yet did his father have “compassion” on him! And O dear Christian reader, how did you and I look just before the Father received us? Understandings darkened, hearts desperately wicked, wills rebellious, minds at enmity against Him, with “no good thing” in us! Nevertheless, “God, who is rich in mercy, for His great love wherewith He loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ” (Eph 2:4-5).

Third, his father “ran” to meet him. We do not read of the “prodigal” running as he set out to return to his “father.” All that is said of him is that “he arose, and came to his father.” But of the “father” it is said that he “ran!” Do you know dear reader, that this is the only verse in all the Bible which represents God as being in a hurry! In the restoration of the ruined earth He acted orderly, we might say leisurely. In everything else but this, God is viewed as acting with calmness and deliberation, as befits One who has all eternity at His disposal. But here is what we term the impatience of divine Love.

Fourth, his father “fell on his neck.” He not only “saw him” while a great way off, he not only had “compassion” on this woe-begone prodigal, he not only “ran” to meet him, but he “fell on his neck.” He embraced him; he flung around him the welcoming arms of love.

Fifth, his father “kissed him.” Once more we would point out that nothing is said here of the son kissing the father. It is the “father” that takes the lead at every stage! He “kissed” him, not rebuffed him. He “kissed” him, not bade him depart. He “kissed” him, not chided him for his wanderings. What marvelous grace! How all this reveals the Father’s heart! The “kiss” speaks of love, of reconciliation, of intimate relationship.

4. The Prodigal’s Response

Notice now the “prodigal’s” response. “And the son said unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy son” (:21). Notice three things. *First*, he is deeply conscious of his sinful condition, and he hesitates not to confess it. And the nearer we approach the thrice holy God the clearer shall we perceive our vileness. *Second*, he was profoundly convinced of his unworthiness, and delayed not to own it. It is a discovery of the marvelous grace of God which brings us to a deeper realization of how thoroughly undeserving we are, for grace and merit are as much opposed to each other as light and darkness. *Third*, observe that he says nothing now about being made a “hired servant!” No; the wondrous grace of the “father” had taught him better.

The Robe Which Was Put upon Him

“But the father said to his servants, Bring forth the best robe, and put it on him” (:22). There are four things to be noted here. First, the position the “son” yet occupied. We cannot but admire the marvelous accuracy and beauty of every line in this divinely drawn picture. The previous verses have shown us the happy meeting between the father and the son, the father’s hearty welcome, the son’s broken-hearted confession. And this, be it remembered, is viewed as occurring some distance away from the father’s house, for he “ran” out to meet him. Now, as the father and son draw near to the house, the father calls to his servants, and says, “Bring forth the best robe.” Ah! the “father” could not have the prodigal at his table in his filthy rags. No; that would be setting aside the righteous requirements of His House: “Grace reigns through righteousness” (Rom 5:21), and never at the expense of it. Beautiful it is, then, to behold grace which ran out to meet the “prodigal,” and now the righteousness which makes provision for the covering of his filthy rags!

Second, we behold with thankful hearts the provision that is made for the poor wanderer. Note it carefully that the prodigal did not bring his “robe” with him out of the far country, nor did he procure it on his homeward journey. No indeed; it was provided for him, was furnished by the father. It was there ready for him, waiting for him!

Third, admire the quality of the clothing provided for him. Said the father, “Bring forth the best robe.” What marvelous grace was this! The “best robe” in the father’s house was reserved for the prodigal! And what can this signify, but that the sinner saved by grace shall be robed in a garment more glorious than that worn by the unfallen angels! But, we exclaim, Can such a thing be? Is that possible? Ah! dear readers, what is this “best robe”? Why it is the imputed righteousness of Christ Himself which shall cover the filthy rags of our righteousness—that “imputed righteousness” which was wrought out for us in the perfect obedience and vicarious death of our Savior. Read with me Isaiah 61:10: “I will greatly rejoice in the Lord, my soul shall be joyful in my God; for He hath clothed me with the garments of salvation, He hath covered me with the robe of righteousness.” How remarkable it is to notice that this “best robe” was the first thing which the “prodigal” received at the hands of his father! Right here is the answer to the objection made by those who reject the evangelical interpretation of this parable, for in the “best robe” we have that which speaks of the life and death of Christ.

Fourth, notice that the “best robe” was placed upon him: “Bring forth the best robe, and put it on Him” (:22). Everything was done for him. Not only was the “best robe” provided for him, it was also placed upon him. How this reminds us of what we read in Genesis 3:21: “Unto Adam also and to his wife did the Lord God make coats of skins, and clothed them.” The Lord God not only Himself supplied the “coats of skins,” but He “clothed” our first parents! We find the same thing again in Zechariah 3:4: “Take away the filthy garments from him. And unto him he said, Behold, I have caused thine iniquity to pass from thee, and I will clothe thee with change of raiment.” Oh to grace how great a debtor!

The Ring Placed upon His Hand

“And put a ring on his hand” (:22). Again we notice that the ring was not supplied by him, but provided for him. And, too, it was not handed to him, but put on him—not a thing did he do for himself! And of what does the “ring,” put “on his hand,” speak? The “ring” is the seal of love, of plighted troth. Later it becomes the symbol of wedded union. And, is it not true that the returning sinner receives not only the “best robe” of Christ’s imputed righteousness, but also God’s seal, which “seal” is the Holy Spirit Himself: “Who hath also sealed us, and given the earnest of the Spirit in our hearts” (2Co 1:22)? Yes, the Holy Spirit is the Seal of God’s love, the evidence of a plighted troth, for, “grieve not the Holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption” (Eph 4:30). And, again, it is the Holy Spirit who unites us to Christ: “But he that is joined unto the Lord is one spirit” (1Co 6:17). The “ring” also speaks of ownership: the woman who wears my ring does so as a sign that she is mine—my wife. So, too, the Holy Spirit in us tells us that we belong to Christ: “If any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of His” (Rom 8:9). And once more, in Scripture the “ring” is given as a mark of high honor and esteem: “And Pharaoh took off his ring from his hand, and put it upon Joseph’s hand, and arrayed him in vestures of fine linen, and put a gold chain around his neck...and they cried before him, Bow the knee” (Gen 41:42-43). This “ring” which the “father” gave to the “prodigal” was put on his hand. Now the hand speaks of labor. As then the “ring” is here the emblem of the Holy Spirit, does not this signify that henceforth, all our works should be performed in the power of that same Spirit?

The Shoes Provided for His Feet

“And shoes on his feet” (:22). Once more we are constrained to say how marvelously complete is this lovely parabolic picture. Here we see every need of the believer met. The “kiss” of reconciliation to assure him of a hearty welcome; the “best robe” to cover his filthy rags; the “ring” put on his hand, to show that he belongs to God, and to denote that his labors henceforth must be in the power of the Spirit. And now the “shoes” for his “feet” speak of God’s provision for the daily walk.

In giving instructions to Moses concerning the observance of the Passover, the Lord said, “And thus shall ye eat it: with your loins girded, your shoes on your feet, and your staff in your hand” (Exo 12:11). They were not prepared to go forth on their pilgrimage until “shoes” were on their feet. And how blessed is the sequel: forty years later Moses reminded them, that though the Lord had led them for forty years in the wilderness, “Your clothes are not waxen old upon you, and thy shoe is not waxen old upon thy foot!” So, again, when the Lord sent forth the twelve, he said to them, “be shod with sandals” (Mar 6:9). And in Ephesians 6 where believers are exhorted to “put on the whole armor of God,” one of the specifications is, “And your feet shod with the preparation of the Gospel of peace.” Not until our feet are thus shod are we prepared to go forth with the Gospel of God’s grace to a perishing world. It is exceedingly blessed to contrast these two passages: “Their feet (the wicked) run to evil, and they make haste to shed innocent blood” (Isa 59:7); “How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that bringeth

good tidings, that publisheth peace; that bringeth good tidings of good, that publisheth salvation!” (Isa 52:7).

The Fatted Calf Killed and Eaten

“And bring hither the fatted calf, and kill it: and let us eat, and be merry” (:23). First, note the contrast between the words of the father in connection with the “best robe,” and here with the fatted calf. In the former it was “bring forth,” which indicated that the “prodigal” was on the outside. But now that he has been clothed, now that he has had put on him the “best robe,” now that he has been suitably adorned for the “father’s” presence—“Made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light” (Col 1:12)—he is now inside the “father’s” house, hence the “bring hither.” How marvelously and minutely accurate!

The “fatted calf” speaks of Christ Himself in all His excellency, provided, too, by the Father. The killing of the “calf” tells of the Savior’s death for us, thus making it possible for sinners to be reconciled to a holy God. But the “fatted calf” was not only killed, it was, like the Passover “lamb,” to be eaten, and eating here speaks of communion. And observe the word of the “father” here: it was not, “and let him eat,” but “let us eat.” It is the father with the now reconciled sinner, coming together, and they communing together over that which speaks of Christ. It is the sacrifice of Christ which is the ground of our fellowship with the Father.

5. The Resultant Joy

“And let us eat, and be merry: for this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost and is found. And they began to be merry” (:23-24). How inexpressibly blessed is this! What a glorious climax! Here is the “prodigal,” now a son at the Father’s table, a place—not among the “hired servants,” but—in the Father’s family is now His. Together they commune over that which tells of Christ, the perfect One, slain for us. And what is the fruit of “communion”? Is it not joy, such merriment of heart of which this poor world knows nothing? And note again the plural number: it is not only that “he,” the son, was “merry,” but “they began to be merry.” The Father finds His delight, together with His children, feeding upon Christ the Son.

It is indeed striking to contrast what is before us here in Luke 15 with another scene presented in the Old Testament Scriptures. In 1 Samuel 28 we have brought before us the apostate Saul and the witch of Endor—a greater contrast could not be imagined! And here, too, we read of a fatted calf being killed, but how great the difference! “And the woman had a fat calf in the house; and she hasted, and killed it, and took flour, and kneaded it, and did bake unleavened bread thereof: And she brought it before Saul, and before his servants; and they did eat. Then they rose up, and went away that night” (1Sa 28:24-25). Yes, they did “eat,” but notice that nothing was said of them being “merry.” No indeed. They represented that large company found among the professed people of God who take the name of Christ on their lips, and even go through the form of com-

muning with Him as they come to His “table.” But after all, it is only a pretense, a mechanical performance. Their hearts are not in it. Their souls do not feed upon Christ.

And note, too, another striking contrast. Of Saul and his servants it is said, “They did eat. Then they rose up, and went away that night” (1Sa 28:25). Ah! solemn thought, unspeakably solemn. The formal professor rises from the “table,” and goes away—leaves that which speaks of Christ; goes away as joyless and empty as he came; goes away into that dark “night” which shall never end.

But how entirely different is what we read of concerning the reconciled “prodigal!” He, together with his father, sits down to eat of the fatted calf and “they began to be merry.” And there the picture leaves them! Nothing is said about going “away,” still less is there any reference to the “night.” And “they began to be merry,” and that merriment is only just begun. Blessed be God, it shall know no ending. Together with the Father, finding our joy in Christ, we shall be “merry” forever and ever.

6. The Elder Son

And now perhaps a closing word should be said upon the “elder son.” It seems strange to us that so many have experienced difficulty here. Who is represented by the “elder son”? Almost endless are the answers given. Personally, we are satisfied that the elder son represents the same class as do the “ninety and nine sheep,” and the nine pieces of silver. These picture the “Pharisees and scribes” who murmured against the Savior because He received and ate with sinners (verse 2). The one parable in three parts was designed by Christ to show how that God did go after that which was lost, and what was the blessed portion which they received from Him. Then He contrasts the lot of those who, because they deem themselves righteous, refuse to take the place of sinners before Him. He meets them on the ground of their own profession, and therefore does He speak of them as “sheep” and the “elder son.” But oh, what a portion is theirs!

In the first part of the parable the self-righteous formalists who despise the grace of God are represented as being left in the wilderness (see verse 4), while in the last part of the parable he is seen outside the father’s house. How accurate and yet how tragic is the picture Christ here draws of the Pharisee. “Now his elder son was in the field: and as he came and drew nigh to the house, he heard music and dancing. And he called one of the servants, and asked what these things meant” (:25-26). Ah! he is a stranger to the merriment of those in fellowship with God. He knows not why they should be so supremely happy, and therefore does he have to ask “what these things meant.” And when explanation is made to him we are told, “he was angry, and would not go in” (:28). But more, “therefore came his father out, and intreated him. And he answering said to his father, Lo, these many years do I serve thee, neither transgressed I at any time thy commandment; and yet thou never gavest me a kid, that I make merry with my friends” (:28-29). He speaks of “serving” his father for this is all he knows. He boasts of his obedience, and then he confesses his lack of that which speaks of communion. And how he betrayed himself when he said, “Yet thou never gavest me a kid, that I might make merry with my

friends,” not “with thee!” The closing verses of the chapter must be interpreted in the light of the whole context: “Thou art ever with me.” Here Christ puts into the mouth of this elder son that which was the boast of the proud Pharisee, but it should be carefully noted that throughout he is carefully pictured as being on the outside, see especially verse 28.

But let our final word be upon the “prodigal.” By comparing carefully six clauses it will be found they are arranged in couplets, and each couplet points a striking contrast. First, we read “There arose a mighty famine in the land” (:14): now contrast what we read in verse 20, “And he arose, and came to his father.” Second, “He came to himself” (:17): now contrast what is said in verse 20, he “Came to his father.” Third, “He began to be in want” (:14): now contrast what we have in verse 24, “And they began to be merry.” And how striking is the order of these.

Now dear reader, is this intelligible to you, or have I been speaking in an unknown tongue? Have you felt the “famine” of this world? Have you been “in want”—your soul crying out for a satisfying portion? Have you “come to yourself,” come to your senses, and discovered the “exceeding sinfulness of sin”? If so, have you come to God and taken the place of a lost sinner before Him? Have you cast yourself upon His sovereign grace and received as your own this wondrous Provision He has made for hell-deserving sinners? If you have, then you know the blessedness of belonging to God’s family. If you have not, and will come to God now, just as you are, confessing your utter sinfulness and unworthiness, and casting yourself on His free grace, you too shall receive a hearty welcome, the kiss of reconciliation, the robe of righteousness, and a place in communion with God Himself. “Come, for all things are now ready.” ❧

Available in print as a booklet from Chapel Library.

Doctrine

The Scriptures and Christ

1. Scripture Reveals the Mystery of Christ

The order we follow in this series is that of experience. It is not until man is made thoroughly displeased with himself that he begins to aspire after God. The fallen creature, deluded by Satan, is self-satisfied till his sin-blinded eyes are opened to get a sight of himself. The Holy Spirit first works in us a sense of our ignorance, vanity, property, and depravity, before He brings us to perceive and acknowledge that in God alone are to be found true wisdom, real blessedness, perfect goodness, and unspotted righteousness. We must be made conscious of our imperfections ere we can really appreciate the divine perfections. As the perfections of God are contemplated, man becomes still more aware of the infinite distance that separates him from the Most High. As he learns something of God's pressing claims upon him, and his own utter inability to meet them, he is prepared to hear and welcome the good news that Another has fully met those claims for all who are led to believe in Him.

"Search the scriptures," said the Lord Jesus, and then He added, "for they are they which testify of me" (Joh 5:39). They testify of Him as the only Saviour for perishing sinners, as the only Mediator between God and men, as the only One through whom the Father can be approached. They testify to the wondrous perfections of His person, the varied glories of His offices, the sufficiency of His finished work. Apart from the Scriptures, He cannot be known. In them alone He is revealed. When the Holy Spirit takes of the things of Christ and shows them unto His people, in thus making known to the soul He uses naught but what is written. While it is true that Christ is the key to the Scriptures, it is equally true that only in the Scriptures do we have an opening up of the "mystery of Christ" (Eph 3:4).

Now the measure in which we profit from our reading and study of the Scriptures may be ascertained by the extent to which Christ is becoming more real and more precious unto our hearts. To "grow in grace" is defined as "in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ" (2Pe 3:18): the second clause there is not something in addition to the first, but is an explanation of it. To "know" Christ (Phi 3:10) was the supreme longing and aim of the apostle Paul, longing and an aim to which he subordinated all other interest. But mark it well, the "knowledge" which is spoken of in these verses, is

not intellectual but spiritual, not theoretical but experimental, not general but personal. It is a supernatural knowledge, which is imparted to the regenerate heart by the operations of the Holy Spirit, as He interprets and applies to us the Scriptures concerning Him. Now the knowledge of Christ, which the blessed Spirit imparts to the believer through the Scriptures, profits him in different ways—according to his varying frames, circumstances and needs. Concerning the bread which God gave to the children of Israel during their wilderness wanderings, it is recorded that “some gathered more, some less” (Exo 16:17). The same is true in our apprehension of Him of whom the manna was a type. There is that in the wondrous person of Christ which is exactly suited to our every condition, every circumstance, every need, both for time and eternity; but we are slow in realizing it, and slower still to act upon it. There is an inexhaustible fullness in Christ (Joh 1:16) which is available for us to draw from, and the principle regulating the extent to which we become “strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus” (2Ti 2:1) is, “according unto your faith be it unto you” (Mat 9:29).

A. *Our Need of Christ*

An individual is profited from the Scriptures when they *reveal to him his need of Christ*. Man in his natural estate deems himself self-sufficient. True, he has a dim perception that all is not quite right between himself and God. Yet he has no difficulty in persuading himself that he is able to do that which will propitiate¹⁹ Him. That lies at the foundation of all man’s “religion,” begun by Cain, in whose “way” (Jude 11) the multitudes still walk. Tell the devout religionist that “they that are in the flesh cannot please God” (Rom 8:8), and he is at once offended. Press upon him the fact that “all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags” (Isa 64:6), and his hypocritical urbanity at once gives place to anger. So it was when Christ was on earth. The most religious people of all, the Jews, had no sense that they were “lost” and in dire need of an almighty Saviour.

“They that are whole need not a physician, but they that are sick” (Mat 9:12). It is the peculiar office of the Holy Spirit, by His application of the Scriptures, to convict sinners of their desperate condition, to bring them to see that their state is such that “from the sole of the foot even unto the head there is no soundness” in them, but “wounds, and bruises, and putrefying sores” (Isa 11:6). As the Spirit convicts us of our sins—our ingratitude to God, our murmuring against Him, our wanderings from Him—as He presses upon us the claims of God—His right to our love, obedience and adoration, and all our sad failures to render Him His due—then are we made to recognize that Christ is our only hope, and that except we flee to Him for refuge, the righteous wrath of God will most certainly fall upon us.

Nor is this to be limited to the initial experience of conversion. The more the Spirit deepens His work of grace in the regenerated soul, the more that individual is made conscious of his pollution, his sinfulness, and his vileness; and the more does he discover his need of and learn to value that precious, precious, blood which cleanses from all sin. The

¹⁹ **propitiate** – to regain good will by appeasing just wrath.

Spirit is here to glorify Christ, and one chief way in which He does so is by opening wider and wider the eyes of those for whom He died, to see how suited Christ is for such wretched, foul, hell-deserving creatures. Yes, the more we are truly profiting from our reading of the Scriptures, the more do we feel our need of Him.

B. Making Christ More Real

An individual is profited from the Scriptures when they *make Christ more real to him*. The great mass of the Israelitish nation saw nothing more than the outward shell in the rites and ceremonies which God instructed, but a regenerated remnant were privileged to behold Christ Himself. "Abraham rejoiced to see my day" said Christ (Joh 8:56). Moses esteemed "the reproach of Christ" greater riches than the treasure of Egypt (Heb 11:26). So it is in Christendom. To the multitudes Christ is but a name, or at most a historical character. They have no personal dealings with Him, enjoy no spiritual communion with Him. Should they hear one speak in rapture of His excellency, they regard him as an enthusiast or a fanatic. To them Christ is unreal, vague, intangible. But with the real Christian it is far otherwise. The language of his heart is,

*"I have heard the voice of Jesus; Tell me not of aught beside.
I have seen the face of Jesus; All my soul is satisfied."*

Yet such a blissful sight is not the consistent and unvarying experience of the saints. Just as clouds come in between the sun and the earth, so failures in our walk interrupt our communion with Christ and serve to hide from us the light of His countenance. "He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me: and he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and will manifest myself to him" (Joh 14:21). Yes, it is the one who by grace is treading the path of obedience to whom the Lord Jesus grants manifestations for Himself. And the more frequent and prolonged these manifestations are, the more real He becomes to the soul, until we are able to say with Job, "I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear; but now mine eye seeth thee" (42:5). Thus the more Christ is becoming a living reality to me, the more I am profiting from the Word.

C. Greater Engrossment in Christ's Perfections

An individual is profited from the Scriptures when he becomes *more engrossed with Christ's perfections*. It is a sense of need which first drives the soul to Christ, but it is the realization of His excellency which draws us to run after Him. The more real Christ becomes to us, the more are we attracted by His perfections. At the beginning He is viewed only as a Saviour, but as the Spirit continues to take of the things of Christ and show them unto us we discover that upon His head are "many crowns" (Rev 19:12). Of old it was said, "His name shall be called Wonderful" (Isa 9:6); His name signifies all that He is as made known in Scripture. "Wonderful" are His offices, in their number, variety, sufficiency. He is the Friend that sticks closer than a brother, to help in every time of need. He is the great High Priest, who is touched with the feeling of our infirmities. He is the Advocate with the Father, who pleads our cause when Satan accuses us.

Our great need is to be occupied with Christ, to sit at His feet as Mary did, and receive out of His fullness. Our chief delight should be to “consider the Apostle and High Priest of our profession” (Heb 3:1): to contemplate the various relations which He sustains to us, to meditate upon the many promises He has given, to dwell upon His wondrous and changeless love for us. As we do this, we shall so delight ourselves in the Lord that the siren voices of this world will lose all their charm for us. Ah, my reader, do you know anything about this in your own actual experience? Is Christ the chief among ten thousand to your soul? Has He won your heart? Is it your chief joy to get alone and be occupied with Him? If not, your Bible reading and study have profited you little indeed.

D. Christ Becoming More Precious

An individual is profited from the Scriptures as *Christ becomes more precious to him*. Christ is precious in the esteem of all true believers (1Pe 2:7). They count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus their Lord (Phi 3:8). His name to them is an ointment poured forth (Song 1:3). As the glory of God, that appeared in the wondrous beauty of the temple and in the wisdom and splendor of Solomon, drew worshippers to him from the uttermost parts of the earth, so the unparalleled excellency of Christ which was prefigured thereby does more powerfully attract the hearts of His people. The devil knows this full well, therefore is he ceaselessly engaged in blinding the minds of them that believeth not, by placing between them and Christ the allurements of this world. God permits him to assail the believer also, but it is written, “resist the devil, and he will flee from you.” Resist him by definite and earnest prayer, entreating the Spirit to draw out your affections to Christ.

The more we are engaged with Christ’s perfections, the more we love and adore Him. It is lack of experimental acquaintance with Him that makes our hearts so cold towards Him. But where real and daily fellowship is cultivated the Christian will be able to say with the Psalmist, “Whom have I in heaven but thee? And there is none upon earth that I desire beside thee” (Psa 73:25). This it is which is the very essence and distinguishing nature of true Christianity. Legalistic zealots may be busily engaged in tithing mint and anise and cumin, they may encompass sea and land to make one proselyte, and yet have no love for God in Christ. It is the heart that God looks at: “My son, give me thine heart” (Pro 23:26) is His demand. The more precious Christ is to us, the more delight does He have in us.

E. Increasing Confidence in Christ

An individual who is profited from the Scriptures has an *increasing confidence in Christ*. There is “little faith” (Mat 14:31) and “great faith” (Mat 8:10). There is the “full assurance of faith” (Heb 10:22), and trusting in the Lord “with all the heart” (Pro 3:5). Just as there is growing “from strength to strength” (Psa 84:7), so we read of “from faith to faith” (Rom 1:17). The stronger and steadier our faith, the more the Lord Jesus is honored. Even a cursory reading of the four Gospels reveals the fact that nothing pleased the Saviour more than the firm reliance which was placed in Him by the few who really

counted upon Him. He Himself lived and walked by faith, and the more we do so the more are the members being conformed to their Head. Above everything else there is one thing to be aimed at and diligently sought by earnest prayer: that our faith may be increased. Of the Thessalonian saints Paul was able to say, "Your faith groweth exceedingly" (2Th 1:3).

Now Christ cannot be trusted at all unless He be known, and the better He is known the more He will be trusted: "And they that know thy name will put their trust in thee" (Psa 9:10). As Christ becomes more real to the heart, as we are increasingly occupied with His manifold perfections and He becomes more precious to us, confidence in Him is deepened until it becomes as natural to trust Him as it is to breathe. The Christian life is a walk of faith (2Co 5:7), and that very expression denotes a continual progress, an increasing deliverance from doubts and fears, a fuller assurance that all He has promised He will perform.

Abraham is the father of all them that believe, and thus the record of his life furnishes an illustration of what a deepening confidence in the Lord signifies. *First*, at His bare word he turned his back upon all that was dear to the flesh. *Second*, he went forth in simple dependence on Him and dwelt as a stranger and sojourner in the land of promise, though he never owned a single acre of it. *Third*, when the promise was made of a seed in his old age, he considered not the obstacles in the way of its fulfillment, but was strong in faith, giving glory to God. *Finally*, when called upon to offer up Isaac, through whom the promises were to be realized, he accounted that God was able to "raise him up, even from the dead" (Heb 11:19).

In the history of Abraham we are shown how grace is able to subdue an evil heart of unbelief, how the spirit may be victorious over the flesh, how the supernatural fruits of a God-given and God-sustained faith may be brought forth by a man of like passions with us. This is recorded for our encouragement, for us to pray that it may please the Lord to work in us what He wrought in and through the father of the faithful. Nothing more pleases, honors, and glorifies Christ than the confiding trust, the expectant confidence, and the child-like faith of those to whom He has given every cause to trust Him with all their hearts. And nothing more evidences those who are being profited from the Scriptures than an increasing faith in Christ.

F. Deepening Desire to Please Christ

An individual is profited from the Scriptures when they beget in him a *deepening desire to please Christ*. "Ye are not your own...For ye are bought with a price" (1Co 6:19-20) is the first great fact that Christians need to apprehend. Henceforth they are not to "live unto themselves, but unto Him which died for them, and rose again" (2Co 5:15). Love delights to please its object, and the more our affections are drawn out to Christ the more shall we desire to honour Him by a life of obedience to His known will. "If a man love me, he will keep my words" (Joh 14:23). It is not in happy emotions or in verbal professions of devotion, but in the actual assumption of His yoke and the practical submitting to His precepts, that Christ is most honoured.

It is at this point particularly that the genuineness of our profession may be tested and proved. Have they a faith in Christ who make no effort to learn His will? What a contempt of the king if his subjects refuse to read his proclamation! Where there is faith in Christ there will be delight in His commandments, and a sorrowing when they are broken by us. When we displease Christ we should mourn over our failure. It is impossible seriously to believe that it was my sins which caused the Son of God to shed His precious blood, without my hating those sins. If Christ groaned under sin, we shall too, and the more sincere those groanings be, the more earnestly shall we seek grace for deliverance from all that displeases, and for strength to do all that which pleases our blessed Redeemer.

G. Longing for Christ's Return

An individual is profited from the Scriptures when they cause him to long for the *return of Christ*. Love can be satisfied with nothing short of a sight of its object. True, even now we behold Christ by faith, yet it is "through a glass, darkly." But at His coming we shall behold Him "face to face" (1Co 13:12). Then will be fulfilled His own words, "Father, I will that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory, which thou hast given me, for thou lovedst me before the foundation of the world" (Joh 17:24). Only this will fully meet the longings of His heart, and only this will meet the longings of those redeemed by Him. Only then will He "see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied" (Isa 53:11). And "as for me, I will behold thy face in righteousness: I shall be satisfied, when I awake, with thy likeness" (Psa 17:15).

At the return of Christ we shall be done with sin for ever. The elect are predestined to be conformed to the image of God's Son, and that divine purpose will be realized only when Christ receives His people unto Himself. "We shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is" (1Jo 3:2). Never again will our communion with Him be broken, never again shall we groan and moan over our inward corruptions; never again shall we be harassed with unbelief. He will present His Church to Himself "a glorious church, not having spot, wrinkle, or any such thing" (Eph 5:27). For that hour we eagerly wait. For our Redeemer we lovingly look. The more we yearn for the coming One, the more we are trimming our lamps in earnest expectation of His coming, the more do we give evidence that we are profiting from our knowledge of the Word.

2. Application

Let the reader and writer honestly search themselves as in the presence of God. Let us seek truthful answers to these questions. Have we a deeper felt sense of our need of Christ? Is He Himself becoming to us a brighter and living reality? Are we finding increasing delight in being occupied with His lovely perfections? Is Christ Himself becoming daily more precious to us? Is our faith in Him growing so that we confidently trust Him for everything? Are we really seeking to please Him in all the details of our lives? Are we so yearning for Him that we should be filled with joy, if we knew for certain that

He would come during the next twenty-four hours? May the Holy Spirit search our hearts with these pointed questions. ❧

From Profiting from the Word, paperback available in print from Chapel Library.

The Word of Forgiveness

“Then said Jesus, Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do.”—Luke 23:34

The Word of Forgiveness

Man had done his worst. The One by Whom the world was made had come into it, but the world knew Him not. The Lord of Glory had tabernacled among men, but He was not wanted. The eyes which sin had blinded saw in Him no beauty that He should be desired. At His birth there was no room in the inn, which foreshadowed the treatment He was to receive at the hands of men. Shortly after His birth Herod sought to slay Him, and this intimated the hostility His person evoked and forecast the Cross as the climax of man's enmity. Again and again His enemies attempted His destruction. And now their vile desires are granted them. The Son of God had yielded Himself up into their hands. A mock trial had been gone through, and though His judges found no fault in Him, nevertheless, they had yielded to the insistent clamoring of those who hated Him as they cried again and again, “Crucify him.”

The fell deed had been done. No ordinary death would suffice for His implacable foes. A death of intense suffering and shame was decided upon. A cross had been secured; the Saviour had been nailed to it. And there He hangs, silent. But presently His pallid lips are seen to move—Is He crying for pity? No. What then? Is He pronouncing malediction upon His crucifiers? No. He is praying, praying for His enemies—“Then said Jesus, Father, forgive them: for they know not what they do” (Luk 23:34).

The first of the seven cross-sayings of our Lord presents Him in the attitude of *prayer*. How significant! How instructive! His public ministry had opened with prayer (Luk 3:21), and here we see it closing in prayer. Surely He has left us an example! No longer might those hands minister to the sick, for they are nailed to the Cross; no longer may those feet carry Him on errands of mercy, for they are fastened to the cruel tree; no longer may He engage in instructing the apostles, for they have forsaken Him and fled—how then does He occupy Himself? In the ministry of prayer! What a lesson for us.

Perhaps these lines may be read by some who by reason of age and sickness are no longer able to work actively in the Lord's vineyard. Possibly in days gone by, you were a

teacher, you were a preacher, a Sunday-school teacher, a tract-distributor: but now you are bed-ridden. Yes, but you are still here on earth! Who knows but what God is leaving you here for a few more days to engage in the ministry of prayer—and perhaps accomplish more by this than all your past active service. If you are tempted to disparage such a ministry, remember your Saviour. He prayed—prayed for others, prayed for sinners, *even in His last hours*.

In praying for His enemies, not only did Christ set before us a perfect example of how we should treat those who wrong and hate us, but He also taught us never to regard any as beyond the reach of prayer. If Christ prayed for His murderers then surely we have encouragement to pray now for the very chief of sinners! Christian reader, *never lose hope*. Does it seem a waste of time for you to continue praying for that man, that woman, that wayward child of yours? Does their case seem to become more hopeless every day? Does it look as though they had gotten beyond the reach of divine mercy? Perhaps that one you have prayed for so long has been ensnared by one of the Satanic cults of the day, or he may now be an avowed and blatant infidel, in a word, an open enemy of Christ. Remember then the Cross. Christ prayed for His enemies. Learn then not to look on any as beyond the reach of prayer.

One more thought concerning this prayer of Christ. We are shown here the *efficacy* of prayer. This Cross-intercession of Christ for His enemies met with a marked and definite answer. The answer is seen in the conversion of three thousand souls on the day of Pentecost. I base this conclusion on Acts 3:17, where the apostle Peter says, “And now, brethren, I know that through ignorance ye did it, as did also your rulers.” It is to be noted that Peter uses the word “ignorance,” which corresponds with our Lord’s “they know not what they do.” Here then is the divine explanation of the three thousand converted under a single sermon. It was not Peter’s eloquence which was the cause, but the Saviour’s prayer.

And, Christian reader, the same is true of us. Christ prayed for you and me long before we believed in Him. Turn to John 17:20 for proof: “Neither pray I for these [the apostles] alone, but for them also *which shall believe on me* through their word” (John 17:20). Once more let us profit from the perfect Exemplar. Let us too make intercession for the enemies of God, and if we pray in faith we also shall pray effectively unto the salvation of lost sinners.

To come now directly to our text: “Then said Jesus, Father, forgive them for they know not what they do.”

1. Here we see the fulfillment of the prophetic word.

How much God made known beforehand of what should transpire on the day of days! What a complete picture did the Holy Spirit furnish of our Lord’s Passion with all the attendant circumstances! Among other things it had been foretold that the Saviour should “make intercession for the transgressors” (Isa 53:12). This did not have reference to the present ministry of Christ at God’s right hand. It is true that “He is able also to

save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them” (Heb 7:25), but this speaks of what He is doing now for those who have believed on Him, whereas Isaiah 53:12 had reference to His gracious act at the time of His crucifixion. Observe what His intercession for the transgressors is there linked with—“And he was numbered with the transgressors; and he bare the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors.”

That Christ should make intercession for His enemies was one of the items of the wonderful prophecy found in Isaiah 53. This chapter tells us at least ten things about the humiliation and suffering of the Redeemer. It declared that He should be despised and rejected of men; that He should be a Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief; that He should be wounded, bruised and chastised; that He should be led, unresistingly, to slaughter; that He should be dumb before His shearers; that He should not only suffer at the hands of man but also be bruised by the Lord; that He should pour out His soul unto death; that He should be buried in a rich man’s tomb; and then it was added, that He would be numbered with transgressors. Here then was the prophecy—“and made intercession for the transgressors”; there was the fulfillment of it—“Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.” He thought of His murderers; He pleaded for His crucifiers; He made intercession for their forgiveness.

“Then said Jesus, Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.”

2. Here we see Christ identified with His people.

“Father, forgive them.” On no previous occasion did Christ make such a request of the Father. Never before had He invoked the Father’s forgiveness of others. Hitherto *He Himself* forgave. To the man sick of palsy He had said, “Son, be of good cheer; thy sins be forgiven thee” (Mat 9:2). To the woman who washed His feet with her tears in the house of Simon, He said, “Thy sins are forgiven” (Luk 7:48). Why then should He now ask *the Father* to forgive, instead of directly pronouncing forgiveness Himself?

Forgiveness of sins is a divine prerogative. The Jewish scribes were right when they reasoned “Who can forgive sins but God only” (Mar 2:7). But you say, Christ was God. Truly, but man also—the God-man. He was the Son of God that had become the Son of Man, with the express purpose of offering Himself as a sacrifice for sins. And when the Lord Jesus cried “Father forgive them,” He was on the Cross, and *there* He might not exercise His divine prerogatives. Mark carefully His own words, and then behold the marvelous accuracy of Scripture. He had said, “The Son of Man hath power on earth to forgive sins” (Mat 9:6). But He was no longer on earth! He had been “lifted up from the earth” (Joh 12:32)! Moreover, on the Cross He was acting as our substitute: the Just was about to die for the unjust. Hence it was that, hanging there as our representative, He was *no longer in the place of authority* where He might exercise His own divine prerogatives. Therefore He takes the position of a suppliant before the Father. Thus we say that when the blessed Lord Jesus cried, “Father, forgive them,” we see Him absolutely *identi-*

fied with His people. No longer was He in the position “on earth” where He had the “power” or “right” to forgive sins; instead, He intercedes for sinners—as we must.

“Then said Jesus, Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.”

3. Here we see the divine estimate of sin and its consequent guilt.

Under the Levitical economy God required that atonement should be made for sins of ignorance. “If a soul commit a trespass, and *sin through ignorance*, in the holy things of the Lord; then he shall bring for his trespass unto the Lord a ram without blemish out of the flocks, with thy estimation by shekels of silver, after the shekel of the sanctuary, for a trespass offering: And he shall make amends for the harm that he hath done in the holy thing, and shall add the fifth part thereto, and give it unto the priest: and the priest shall *make an atonement for him* with the ram of the trespass offering, and it shall be forgiven him” (Lev 5:15-16). And again we read, “And if ye have erred, and not observed all these commandments, which the Lord hath spoken unto Moses, even all that the Lord hath commanded you by the hand of Moses, from the day that the Lord commanded Moses, and henceforward among your generations; Then it shall be, if ought be committed *by ignorance* without the knowledge of the congregation, that all the congregation shall offer one young bullock for a burnt offering, for a sweet savor unto the Lord, with his meat offering, and his drink offering, according to the manner, and one kid of the goats for a sin offering. And the priest shall make an atonement for all the congregation of the children of Israel, and it shall be forgiven them; for it is ignorance: and they shall bring their offering, a sacrifice made by fire unto the Lord, *and their sin offering* before the Lord, *for their ignorance*” (Num 15:22-25). It is in view of such Scriptures as these that we find David prayed, “Cleanse thou me from *secret* faults” (Psa 19:12).

Sin is always sin in the sight of God—whether we are conscious of it or not. Sins of ignorance need atonement just as truly as do conscious sins. God is holy, and He will not lower His standard of righteousness to the level of our ignorance. Ignorance is not innocence. As a matter of fact, ignorance is more culpable now than it was in the days of Moses. We have no excuse for our ignorance. God has clearly and fully revealed His will. The Bible is in our hands, and we cannot plead ignorance of its contents except to condemn our laziness. God has spoken, and by His Word we shall be judged.

And yet the fact remains that we *are* ignorant of many things, and the fault and blame are ours. And this does not minimize the enormity of our guilt. Sins of ignorance need divine forgiveness, as our Lord’s prayer here plainly shows. Learn then how high is God’s standard, how great is our need, and praise Him for an atonement of infinite sufficiency, which cleanseth from all sin.

“Then said Jesus, Father, forgive them for they know not what they do.”

4. Here we see the blindness of the human heart.

“They know not what they do.” This does not mean that the enemies of Christ were ignorant of the *fact* of His crucifixion. They did know full well that they had cried out

“Crucify him.” They did know full well that their vile request had been granted them by Pilate. They did know full well that He had been nailed to the tree, for they were eyewitnesses of the crime. What then did our Lord mean when He said, “They know not what they do?” He meant they were ignorant of the enormity of their crime. They “knew not” that it was the Lord of Glory they were crucifying. The emphasis is not on “they *know not*,” but on “they *know not what they do*.”

And yet they *ought* to have known. Their blindness was inexcusable. The Old Testament prophecies which had received their fulfillment in Him were sufficiently plain to identify Him as the Holy One of God. His teaching was unique, for His very critics were forced to admit “Never man spake like this man” (Joh 7:46). And what of His perfect life! He had lived before men a life which had never been lived on earth before. He pleased not Himself. He went about doing good. He was ever at the disposal of others. There was no self-seeking about Him. His was a life of self-sacrifice from beginning to end. His was a life ever lived to the glory of God. His was a life on which was stamped heaven’s approval, for the Father’s voice testified audibly “This is my beloved son, in whom I am *well pleased*.” No, there was no excuse for their ignorance. It only demonstrated the blindness of their hearts. Their rejection of the Son of God bore full witness, once for all, that the carnal mind *is* “enmity against God.”

How sad to think this terrible tragedy is still being repeated! Sinner, you little know what you are doing in neglecting God’s great salvation. You little know how awful is the sin of slighting the Christ of God and spurning the invitations of His mercy. You little know the deep guilt which is attached to your act of refusing to receive the only One who can save you from your sins. You little know how fearful is the crime of saying, “We will not have this man reign over us.” You know not what you do. You regard the vital issue with callous indifference. The question comes today as it did of old, “What shall I do with Jesus which is called Christ?” for you *have to* do something with Him: either you despise and reject Him, or you receive Him as the Saviour of your soul and the Lord of your life.

But, I say again, it seems to you a matter of small moment, of little importance, *which* you do. For years you have resisted the striving of His Spirit. For years you have shelved the all-important consideration. For years you have steeled your heart against Him, closed your eyes to His appeals, and shut your eyes to His surpassing beauty. Ah! *you know not WHAT you do*. You are blind to your madness. Blind to your terrible sin. Yet are you not *excuseless*. You may be saved now if you will. “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and *thou* shalt be saved.” O come to the Saviour now and say with one of old, “Lord, that I might receive my sight.”

“Then said Jesus, Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.”

5. Here we see a lovely exemplification of His own teaching.

In the Sermon on the Mount our Lord taught His disciples “Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and *pray* for them which despiteful-

ly use *you* and persecute you” (Mat 5:44). Above all others, Christ practiced what He preached. Grace and *truth* came by Jesus Christ. He not only taught the truth but was Himself the truth incarnate. Said He, “I am the way, the truth and the life” (Joh 14:6). So here on the Cross He perfectly exemplified His teaching of the mount. In all things He has left us an example.

Notice Christ did not *personally* forgive His enemies. So in Matthew 5:44 He did not exhort His disciples to forgive their enemies, but He does exhort them to “pray” for them. But are we not to forgive those who wrong us? This leads us to a point concerning which there is much need for instruction today. Does Scripture teach that under all circumstances we must always forgive? I answer emphatically, it does not. The Word of God says, “If thy brother trespass against thee, rebuke him; and *if he repent*, forgive him. And if he trespass against thee seven times a day, and seven times in a day turn again to thee saying, I repent; thou shalt forgive him” (Luk 17:3-4). Here we are plainly taught that a condition must be met by the offender *before* we may pronounce forgiveness. The one who has wronged us must first “repent,” that is, judge himself for his wrong and give evidence of his sorrow over it.

But suppose the offender does not repent? Then I am not to forgive him. But let there be no misunderstanding of our meaning here. Even though the one who has wronged me does not repent, nevertheless, I must not harbor ill-feelings against him. There must be no hatred or malice cherished in the heart. Yet, on the other hand, I must not treat the offender as if he had done no wrong. That would be to condone the offense, and therefore I should fail to uphold the requirements of righteousness, and this the believer is ever to do. Does God ever forgive where there is no repentance? No, for Scripture declares, “*If we confess our sins*, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1Jo 1:9).

One thing more. If one has injured me and repented not, while I cannot forgive him and treat him as though he had not offended, nevertheless, not only must I hold no malice in my heart against him, but I must also *pray for him*. Here is the value of Christ’s perfect example. If we cannot forgive, we can pray for God to forgive him.

“Then said Jesus, Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.”

6. Here we see man’s great and primary need.

The first important lesson which all need to learn is that we are sinners, and as such, *unfit* for the presence of a Holy God. It is in vain that we select noble ideals, form good resolutions, and adopt excellent rules to live by, until the sin-question has been settled. It is of no avail that we attempt to develop a beautiful character and aim to do that which will meet God’s approval while there is sin between Him and our souls. Of what use are shoes if our feet are paralyzed. Of what use are glasses if we are blind. The question of the forgiveness of my sins is basic, fundamental, vital. It matters not that I am highly respected by a wide circle of friends if I am yet in my sins. It matters not that I have

made good in business if I am an unpardoned transgressor in the sight of God. What will matter most in the hour of death is: *Have my sins been put away by the blood of Christ?*

The second all-important lesson which all need to learn is how forgiveness of sins may be obtained. What is the *ground* on which a Holy God will forgive sins? And here it is important to remark that there is a vital difference between divine forgiveness and much of human forgiveness. As a general rule, human forgiveness is a matter of leniency, often of laxity. We mean forgiveness is shown at the expense of justice and righteousness. In a human court of law, the judge has to choose between two alternatives: when the one in the dock has been proven guilty, the judge must either *enforce* the penalty of the law, or he must *disregard* the requirements of the law—the one is justice, the other is mercy. The only possible way by which the judge can both enforce the requirements of the law and yet show mercy to its offender, is by a third party offering to suffer in his own person the penalty which the convicted one deserves. Thus it was in the divine counsels. God would not exercise mercy at the expense of justice. God, as the Judge of all the earth, would not set aside the demands of His holy Law. Yet, God would show mercy. How? through One making full satisfaction to His outraged Law. Through His own Son taking the place of all those who believe on Him and bearing their sins in His own body on the tree. God could be just and yet merciful, merciful and yet just. Thus it is that “grace reigns *through righteousness*.”

A righteous ground has been provided on which God can be *just* and yet the justifier of all who believe. Hence it is we are told, “Thus it is written, and thus it behooved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day; And that repentance and remission [forgiveness] of sin should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem” (Luk 24:46-47). And again, “Be it known unto you therefore, men and brethren, that through this man is preached unto you forgiveness of sins: And by him all that believe are justified from all things, from which ye could not be justified by the Law of Moses” (Act 13:38-39). It was in view of the blood He was shedding that the Saviour cried, “Father, forgive them.” It was in view of the atoning sacrifice He was offering, that it can be said, “without shedding of blood is no remission.”

In praying for the forgiveness of His enemies, Christ struck right down to the root of their *need*. And their need was the need of every child of Adam. Reader, have *your* sins been forgiven? that is, remitted or sent away? Are you, by grace, one of those of whom it is said, “In whom *we have* redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins” (Col 1:4)?

“Then said Jesus, Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.”

7. Here we see the triumph of redeeming love.

Mark closely the word with which our text opens: “Then.” The verse which immediately precedes it reads thus, “And when they were come to the place, which is called Calvary, there they crucified him, and the malefactors, one on the right hand and the other on the left.” “*Then*, said Jesus, Father, forgive them.” *Then*—when man had done his

worst. *Then*—when the vileness of the human heart was displayed in climactic devilry. *Then*—when with wicked hands the creature had dared to crucify the Lord of Glory. He might have uttered awful maledictions over them. He might have let loose the thunderbolts of righteous wrath and slain them. He might have caused the earth to open her mouth so that they had gone down alive into the pit. But no. Though subjected to unspeakable shame, though suffering excruciating pain, though despised, rejected, hated, nevertheless, He cries, “Father, forgive them.” That was the triumph of redeeming love. “Love suffereth long, and is kind...beareth all things...endureth all things” (1Co 13). Thus it was shown at the Cross.

When Samson came to his dying hour he used his great strength of body to encompass the destruction of his foes; but the Perfect One exhibited the strength of His love by praying for the forgiveness of His enemies. Matchless grace! “Matchless,” we say, for even Stephen failed to fully follow the blessed example set by the Saviour. If the reader will turn to Acts 7, he will find that Stephen’s first thought was of himself, and then he prayed for his enemies—“And they stoned Stephen, calling upon God, and saying, Lord Jesus receive my spirit. *And* he kneeled down and cried with a loud voice, Lord, lay not this sin to their charge” (Act 7:59-60). But with Christ the order was reversed: He prayed first for His foes, and last for Himself. In *all things* He has the pre-eminence.

Application

And now one concluding word of application and exhortation. Should this chapter have been read by an unsaved person we would earnestly ask him to weigh well the next sentence—How dreadful must it be to oppose Christ and His truth *knowingly*! Those who crucified the Saviour “knew not what they did.” But, my reader, there is a very real and solemn sense in which this is *not* true of you. You *know* you ought to receive Christ as your Saviour, that you *ought* to crown Him the Lord of your life, that you *ought* to make it your first and last concern to please and glorify Him. Be warned then; your danger is great. If you deliberately turn from Him, you turn from the *only* One who can save you from your sins, and it is written, “If we sin willfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins. But a certain fearful looking for of judgment and of fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries” (Heb 10:26-27).

It only remains for us to add a word on the blessed completeness of divine forgiveness. Many of God’s people are unsettled and troubled upon this point. They understand how that all the sins they committed before they received Christ as their Saviour have been forgiven, but oftentimes they are not clear concerning the sins which they commit *after* they have been born again. Many suppose it is possible for them to sin away the pardon which God has bestowed upon them. They suppose that the blood of Christ dealt with their past only, and that so far as the present and the future are concerned, they have to take care of that themselves. But of what value would be a pardon which might be taken away from me at any time? Surely there can be no settled peace

when my acceptance with God and my going to heaven is made to depend upon *my* holding on to Christ, or *my* obedience and faithfulness.

Blessed be God, the forgiveness which He bestows covers *all* sins—past, present and future. Fellow-believer, did not Christ bear your “sins” in His own body on the tree? And were not all your sins *future* sins when He died? Surely, for at that time you had not been born, and so had not committed a single sin. Very well then: Christ bore your “future” sins as truly as your past ones. What the Word of God teaches is that the unbelieving soul is brought out of the place of unforgiveness into the place to which forgiveness attaches. Christians are a forgiven people. Says the Holy Spirit: “Blessed is the man to whom the Lord *will not* impute sin” (Rom 4:8)! The believer is in Christ, and there sin will never again be imputed to us. This is our place or position before God. In Christ is where He beholds us. And because I am in Christ I am completely and eternally forgiven, so much so that never again will sin be laid to my charge as touching my salvation, even though I were to remain on earth a hundred years. I am out of that place for evermore. Listen to the testimony of Scripture: “And you being dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh, hath he [God] *quickeneth together with him* [Christ], having forgiven you all trespasses” (Col 2:13). Mark the two things which are here united (and what God hath joined together let not man put asunder)—my union with a risen Christ is connected with my forgiveness!

If then my life is “hid with Christ in God” (Col 3:3), then I am forever out of the place where *imputation* of sin applies. Hence it is written, “There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus” (Rom 8:1)—how could there be if “*all* trespasses” have been forgiven? None can lay *anything* to the charge of God’s elect (Rom 8:33). Christian reader, join the writer in praising God because we are *eternally forgiven everything*.²⁰ ❧

From Seven Sayings of the Saviour (chapter 1), paperback available in print from Chapel Library.

²⁰ It should be added by way of explanation, that it is the judicial aspect we have dealt with. Restorative forgiveness—which is the bringing back again into communion of a sinning believer—dealt with in 1 John 1:9—is another matter altogether.

The Power of God

1. Establishing a Correct Concept of God's Power

We cannot have a right conception of God unless we think of Him as all-powerful, as well as all-wise. He who cannot do what he will and perform all his pleasure cannot be God. As God hath a will to resolve what He deems good, so has He power to execute His will.

The power of God is that ability and strength whereby He can bring to pass whatsoever He pleases, whatsoever His infinite wisdom may direct, and whatsoever the infinite purity of His will may resolve...As holiness is the beauty of all God's attributes, so power is that which gives life and action to all the perfections of the divine nature. How vain would be the eternal counsels, if power did not step in to execute them. Without power His mercy would be but feeble pity, His promises an empty sound, His threatenings a mere scarecrow. God's power is like Himself: infinite, eternal, incomprehensible; it can neither be checked, restrained, nor frustrated by the creature (Stephen Charnock).

"God hath spoken once; twice have I heard this, that power belongeth unto God" (Psa 62:11). "God hath spoken once": nothing more is necessary! Heaven and earth shall pass away, but His word abideth forever. "God hath spoken once": how befitting His divine majesty! We poor mortals may speak often and yet fail to be heard. He speaks but once and the thunder of His power is heard on a thousand hills.

"The LORD also thundered in the heavens, and the Highest gave his voice; hail stones and coals of fire. Yea, He sent out His arrows, and scattered them; He shot out lightnings, and discomfited them. Then the channels of waters were seen, and the foundations of the world were discovered at thy rebuke, O LORD, at the blast of the breath of thy nostrils."—Psalm 18:13-15

"God hath spoken once": behold His unchanging authority. "For who in the heaven can be compared unto the LORD? who among the sons of the mighty can be likened unto the LORD?" (Psa 89:6). "And all the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as *nothing*: and He doeth according to His will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth: and none can stay His hand, or say unto Him, What doest thou?" (Dan 4:35). This was openly displayed when God became incarnate and tabernacled among men. To the leper He said, "I will; be thou clean. And *immediately* his leprosy was cleansed" (Mat 8:3). To one who had lain in the grave four days He cried, "Lazarus, come forth," and the dead came forth. The stormy wind and the angry waves were hushed at a single word from Him. A legion of demons could not resist His authoritative command.

2. God's Power and Man's Pride

"Power *belongeth* unto God," and to Him alone. Not a creature in the entire universe has an atom of power save what God delegates. But God's power is not acquired, nor does it depend upon any recognition by any other authority. It belongs to Him inherently.

God's power is like Himself, self-existent, self-sustained. The mightiest of men cannot add so much as a shadow of increased power to the Omnipotent One. He sits on no buttressed throne and leans on no assisting arm. His court is not maintained by His courtiers, not does it borrow its splendor from His creatures. He is Himself the great central source and Originator of all power (C.H. Spurgeon).

Not only does all creation bear witness to the great power of God, but also to His entire independency of all created things. Listen to His own challenge: "Where wast thou when I laid the foundations of the earth? declare, if thou hast understanding. Who hath laid the measures thereof, if thou knowest? or who hath stretched the line upon it? Whereupon are the foundations thereof fastened? or who laid the corner stone thereof?" (Job 38:4-6). How completely is the pride of man laid in the dust!

Power is also used as a name of God, "the Son of man sitting on the right hand of power" (Mar 14:62), that is, at the right hand of God. God and power are so inseparable that they are reciprocated. As His essence is immense, not to be confined in place; as it is eternal, not to be measured in time; so it is almighty, not to be limited in regard of action (S. Charnock).

"Lo, these are parts of His ways: but how little a portion is heard of him? but the thunder of His power who can understand?" (Job 26:14). Who is able to count all the monuments of His power? Even that which is displayed of His might in the visible creation is utterly beyond our powers of comprehension, still less are we able to conceive of omnipotence itself. There is infinitely more power lodged in the nature of God than is expressed in all His works.

3. The Hiding of God's Power

"Parts of His ways" we behold in creation, providence, redemption, but only a "little part" of His might is seen in them. Remarkably is this brought out—"And there was the hiding of His power" (Hab 3:4). It is scarcely possible to imagine anything more grandiloquent than the imagery of this whole chapter, yet nothing in it surpasses the nobility of this statement. The prophet (in vision) beheld the mighty God scattering the hills and overturning the mountains, which one would think afforded an amazing demonstration of His power. Nay, says our verse *that* is rather the "hiding" than the displaying of His power. What is meant? This: so inconceivable, so immense, so uncontrollable is the power of Deity that the fearful convulsions which He works in nature conceal more than they reveal of His infinite might!

4. The Immensity of God's Power

It is very beautiful to link together the following passages: He "treadeth upon the waves of the sea" (Job 9:8), which expresses God's uncontrollable power. "He walketh in

the circuit of heaven” (Job 22:14), which tells of the immensity of His presence. He “walketh upon the wings of the wind” (Psa 104:3), which signifies the amazing swiftness of His operations. This last expression is very remarkable. It is not that He “flieth,” or “runneth,” but that He “walketh” and that, on the very “wings of the wind”—on the most impetuous of the elements, tossed into utmost rage, and sweeping along with almost inconceivable rapidity, yet they are *under* His feet, beneath His perfect control!

Let us now consider God’s power *in creation*. “The heavens are thine, the earth also is thine, as for the world and the fullness thereof, thou hast founded them. The north and the south thou hast created them” (Psa 89:11-12). Before man can work he must have both tools and materials, but God began with nothing, and by His word alone out of nothing made all things. The intellect cannot grasp it. God “spake, and it was done; He commanded, and it stood fast” (Psa 33:9). Primeval matter heard His voice. “God said, Let there be...and it was so” (Gen 1). Well may we exclaim, “Thou hast a mighty arm: strong is thy hand, and high is thy right hand” (Psa 89:13).

Who, that looks upward to the midnight sky; and, with an eye of reason, beholds its rolling wonders; who can forbear inquiring, Of what were their mighty orbs formed? Amazing to relate, they were produced without materials. They sprung from emptiness itself. The stately fabric of universal nature emerged out of nothing. What instruments were used by the Supreme Architect to fashion the parts with such exquisite niceness, and give so beautiful a polish to the whole? How was it all connected into one finely-proportioned and nobly finished structure? A bare fiat accomplished all. Let them be, said God. He added no more; and at once the marvelous edifice arose, adorned with every beauty, displaying innumerable perfections, and declaring amidst enraptured seraphs its great Creator’s praise. “By the word of the LORD were the heavens made; and all the host of them by the breath of His mouth (Psa 33:6) (James Hervey, 1789).

Consider God’s power *in preservation*. No creature has power to preserve itself. “Can the rush grow up without mire? Can the flag grow without water?” (Job 8:11). Both man and beast would perish if there were not herbs for food; herbs would wither and die if the earth were not refreshed with fruitful showers. Therefore is God called the Preserver of “man and beast” (Psa 36:6), “upholding all things by the word of His power” (Heb 1:3). What a marvel of divine power is the prenatal life of every human being! That an infant can live at all, and for so many months, in such cramped and filthy quarters, and that without breathing, is unaccountable without the power of God. Truly He “holdeth our soul in life” (Psa 66:9).

The preservation of the earth from the violence of the sea is another plain instance of God’s might. How is that raging element kept pent up within those limits wherein He first lodged it, continuing its channel, without overflowing the earth and dashing in pieces the lower part of the creation? The natural situation of the water is to be above the earth, because it is lighter, and immediately under the air, because it is heavier. Who restrains the natural quality of it? Certainly man does not, and cannot. It is the fiat of its

Creator which alone bridles it: “Hitherto shalt thou come, but no further: and here shall thy proud waves be stayed” (Job 38:11). What a standing monument to the power of God is the preservation of the world!

Consider God’s power *in government*. Take His restraining of the malice of Satan. “The devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour” (1Pe 5:8). He is filled with hatred against God, and with fiendish enmity against men, particularly the saints. He that envied Adam in paradise envies us the pleasure of enjoying any of God’s blessings. Could he have his will, he would treat all the same way he treated Job: he would send fire from heaven on the fruits of the earth, destroy the cattle, cause a wind to overthrow our houses, and cover our bodies with boils. But, little as men may realize it, God bridles him to a large extent, prevents him from carrying out his evil designs, and confines him within His ordinations.

So too God restrains the natural corruption of men. He suffers sufficient outbreakings of sin to show what fearful havoc has been wrought by man’s apostasy from his Maker, but who can conceive the frightful lengths to which men would go were God to remove His curbing hand? “Whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness, their feet are swift to shed blood” (Rom 3:14-15)—This is the nature of *every* descendant of Adam. Then what unbridled licentiousness and headstrong folly would triumph in the world, if the power of God did not interpose to lock down the floodgates of it! See Psalm 93:3-4.

Consider God’s power *in judgment*. When He smites, none can resist Him: see Ezekiel 22:14. How terribly this was exemplified at the Flood! God opened the windows of heaven and broke up the great fountains of the deep, and (excepting those in the ark) the entire human race, helpless before the storm of His wrath, was swept away. A shower of fire and brimstone from heaven, and the cities of the plain were exterminated. Pharaoh and all his hosts were impotent when God blew upon them at the Red Sea. What a terrific word is that in Romans 9:22: “What if God, willing to shew His wrath, and to make His power known, endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction.” God is going to display His mighty power upon the reprobate not merely by incarcerating them in Gehenna, but by supernaturally preserving their bodies as well as souls amid the eternal burnings of the Lake of Fire.

Well may all *tremble* before such a God! To treat with impudence One who can crush us more easily than we can a moth, is a suicidal policy. To openly defy Him who is clothed with omnipotence, who can rend us in pieces or cast us into hell any moment He pleases, is the very height of insanity. To put it on its lowest ground, it is but the part of wisdom to heed His command, “Kiss the Son, lest He be angry, and ye perish from the way, when His wrath is kindled but a little” (Psa 2:12).

Well may the enlightened soul *adore* such a God! The wondrous and infinite perfections of such a Being call for fervent worship. If men of might and renown claim the admiration of the world, how much more should the power of the Almighty fill us with wonderment and homage. “Who is like unto thee, O LORD, among the gods? who is like thee, glorious in holiness, fearful in praises, doing wonders?” (Exo 15:11).

Well may the saint *trust* such a God! He is worthy of implicit confidence. Nothing is too hard for Him. If God were stinted in might and had a limit to His strength we might well despair. But seeing that He is clothed with omnipotence, no prayer is too hard for *Him* to answer, no need too great for Him to supply, no passion too strong for Him to subdue; no temptation too powerful for Him to deliver from, no misery too deep for Him to relieve. “The LORD is the strength of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?” (Psa 27:1).

“Now unto him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us, unto him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen.”—Ephesians 3:20-21

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The Doctrine of the New Birth

The subject of the believer’s salvation needs to be considered from two viewpoints—the divine and the human. God’s work is to regenerate, to justify, to sanctify, and ultimately to glorify. Our responsibility is to repent, to believe, and do good works.

Regeneration is solely the work of God and man has no part or lot in it. This from the very nature of the case. Regeneration is termed a new birth, or birth from above (Joh 3:3), and birth excludes altogether any effort or work on the part of the individual who is born. Personally, we have no more to do with our spiritual birth than we had with our physical. Again, regeneration is likened unto a spiritual resurrection (Eph 2:1; Joh 5:24). Clearly, resurrection is outside man’s province. No corpse can quicken itself. No man and no number of men can reanimate a dead body. Only the living God can speak the word which will call forth a Lazarus from the tomb; and He alone can quicken into newness of life one who, spiritually, is dead in trespasses and sins. Once more, regeneration is denominated a new creation (2Co 5:17; Gal 6:15). Here again we enter God’s domain. He alone can bring into being that which previously had no existence. We repeat, regeneration is solely the work of God, and man has no part or hand in it.

Because regeneration is the work of God it is a miraculous thing. The new birth is no mere outward reformation, no mere turning over a new leaf and endeavoring to live a better life. The new birth is very much more than going forward and taking the preacher’s hand. The new birth is a supernatural operation of God upon man’s spirit. It is a transcendent wonder. All God’s works are wonderful. Physical birth is a marvel. The world in which we live is filled with things that amaze us. But from several standpoints the new birth is more remarkable still. It is a marvel of divine grace. It is a marvel of di-

vine wisdom. It is a marvel of divine beauty. It will prove an eternal marvel, for it is a miracle performed upon and within ourselves, and of which we are personally cognizant. It is a miracle which is being repeated all around us every day.

Because regeneration is the work of God it is a mysterious thing. All God's works are shrouded in impenetrable mystery. Life, natural life, in its origin, its nature, its process, baffles the most careful investigator. Much more is this the case with spiritual life. The Existence and Being of God transcend the finite grasp. How then can we expect to be able to understand the process by which we become His children? Our Lord, Himself, declared that the new birth was a thing of mystery: "the wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth; so is every one that is born of the Spirit" (Joh 3:8). The wind is something about which the most learned scientists know next to nothing. Its nature, the laws which govern it, its causation, all lie beyond the purview of human inquiry. So it is with the new birth. It is profoundly mysterious.

Regeneration is an intensely solemn thing. The new birth is the dividing line between heaven and hell. In God's sight there are but two classes of people in this world—those who are dead in sins, and those who are walking in newness of life. In the physical realm there is no such thing as being between life and death. A man is either dead or alive. The vital spark may become very dim, but while it exists life is present. Let that spark go out altogether, and, though you may dress the body in beautiful clothes and deck it out with all imaginable finery, it is, nevertheless, nothing more than a corpse. So it is in the spiritual world. We are either sinners or saints; spiritually alive or spiritually dead; children of God or children of the devil. In view of this solemn fact, how momentous is the question, Have I been born again? The answer to this question settles our eternal destiny. And in love we would say to all who never have been born again, that if you die in your present condition, the day is coming when you will wish that you had never been born at all. We shall consider:

1. The Nature of the New Birth

What is the new birth? What is the fundamental difference between one who is dead in trespasses and sins, and one who has been quickened together with Christ? Various are the answers returned to these questions; confusing and contradictory are the thoughts often entertained upon this subject. The effects of the new birth are frequently confounded with the new birth itself. Ignorance concerning God's answer to these questions has often caused regenerated persons to doubt whether or not they have actually passed from death unto life. In considering the nature or character of the new birth we shall deal first with the negative side.

A. The New Birth Is Not a Process of Reformation

Reformation is the work of man; regeneration is the work of God. Reformation is the attempt to eliminate evil from the old nature; regeneration is the impartation of a new nature. Reformation aims to earn salvation by our own efforts; regeneration is due to the

gracious operation of the Holy Spirit. Reformation seeks to improve the old creation; regeneration is the bringing into existence of an entirely new creation. Reformation is external; regeneration is internal. Reformation is turning over a new leaf; regeneration is the beginning of a new life. Reformation is a tedious and protracted process; regeneration is instantaneous and complete. In short, reformation is human; regeneration is divine.

B. The New Birth Is Not the Purification of the Heart

Often have we heard preachers tell their congregation that regeneration is a “change of heart.” While their intention is good, their language is misleading. In this as in everything, we do well to “hold fast the form of sound words.” A “change of heart” is an expression nowhere to be found in the Holy Scriptures. It is true there are several passages which seem to convey this idea, but for lack of space we cannot discuss them now. Regeneration does not change the heart, though it results in a radical change of life.

In Jeremiah 17:9 we read, “The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked.” The word which is here rendered “desperately” is usually translated “incurably,” and ought to be so here. The heart is never changed for it is incurably wicked. John 3:6 sets forth the same truth: “That which is born of the flesh is flesh,” and it never becomes anything else. There is no process by which a horse can be developed from a tree. Neither does a son of Adam ever develop into a son of God. Regeneration is not a process of transformation. It is altogether a new creation. Even in a born-again person the old evil heart remains unchanged till the day of one’s death.

C. The New Birth Is Impartation of the Divine Nature

Regeneration is neither the changing of anything in man, nor the removal of anything from man; it is the implanting of an entirely new nature within man. Birth in the spiritual realm is precisely what it is in the physical—it is the gateway of life, the starting point of a new existence. Everything that is born partakes of the nature of its parents. That which is born of the vegetable is vegetable; that which is born of the animal is animal; that which is born of man is human; that which is born of God is divine. Like always begets like. This fundamental law is expressly stated and reiterated on the frontispiece of divine Revelation. In the first chapter of Genesis we read no less than nine times that each order of creation brought forth after its own kind. The herb of the field brought forth after its kind. The fowl of the air brought forth after its kind. The fish in the sea brought forth after its kind. Here is God’s refutation of the infidel theory of evolution. We repeat, like begets like. Those begotten of God are the children of God. When we are born again, born of God, we are made partakers of the divine nature just as really and actually as we were made partakers of the human nature at our first birth. Regeneration, then, is the reception of a new nature, a spiritual nature. Regeneration is the very life of God Himself, communicated to the human spirit. Regeneration gives us a place in the family of God by means of a spiritual birth.

We shall next consider:

2. The Need of the New Birth

The new birth is an absolute necessity. It is something for which there is no substitute whatsoever. None can enter the kingdom of God save those who have been born again. That the new birth is an imperative necessity is clear from the words of our Lord to Nicodemus—"Marvel not that I said unto thee, ye must be born again" (Joh 3:7). He did not say, "Ye may be born again," or "Ye ought to be born again," but "Ye must be born again."

Nowhere else did Jesus Christ put a single statement so strongly or insist upon it with such emphatic repetition. Said He, "Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." And again, "Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God." And yet again, "That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again" (Joh 3:3, 5-7). On other occasions He threw wide open the door of mercy—"Come unto Me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest"—but here He deliberately bars the gate of heaven against all the unregenerate. Hence, His words to Nicodemus become the more solemn when we remember that they fell from the lips of One who never excluded a single soul from eternal blessedness unless truth compelled Him to do so. It is none other than the Son of God who says, "Ye must be born again."

But why is the new birth an imperative necessity? Why is it that no unregenerated person can either see or enter the kingdom of God?

A. Man Is Spiritually Dead

The new birth is a necessity because by nature man is spiritually dead. "By one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned" (Rom 5:12). In the day that Adam ate of the forbidden fruit he died spiritually, and a person who is spiritually dead cannot beget a child who possesses spiritual life. By natural descent we enter this world "dead in trespasses and sins" and in consequence "alienated from the life of God" (Eph 2:1; 4:18). This is no figure of speech, but a solemn fact. Every child which is born into this world enters it entirely destitute of a single spark of spiritual life. Here, then, is the answer to the above questions—a dead person cannot see or enter any kingdom. Man is devoid of spiritual life, and if ever he is to enter the kingdom of God, which is the realm of spiritual life, he must be born into it.

B. The Spiritual Kingdom Requires a Spiritual Nature

The new birth is necessary because the spiritual kingdom requires a spiritual nature. Heaven is a prepared place for a prepared people. Heaven is the habitation of the thrice Holy God and only those who are holy can dwell in His presence for "without holiness no man shall see the Lord" (Heb 12:14). In order for a man to be happy he must be in harmony with his surroundings. If I were to take a number of live fish out of the water, place them on a silver salver, carry them into a garden full of fragrant flowers, and were to produce from a harp the sweetest strains of music, those fish would not be happy. Why? Because they are out of their natural element. They are not in harmony with their

environment. So it would be if an unregenerate person were to enter heaven. He has no faculty for discerning spiritual things; he has no capacity to appreciate the divine glory; he has no power to worship in the beauty of holiness. An unregenerate person could no more enjoy heaven than could a deaf and dumb man an oratorio. To take such an one there, would be like leaving a blind man to walk through the halls of our art galleries.

The spiritual kingdom demands a spiritual nature. This follows a universal law. To appreciate or produce music, one must possess musical gifts. I take a young man and place him in the hands of an efficient music teacher. For several years he takes lessons from him. He diligently studies the theory of music and endeavors to master the laws of harmony. He practices regularly for several hours a day. In a few years' time, will that boy be a musician? That depends altogether upon one thing—does he possess a musical nature? Musicians are born, not manufactured! It is the same in art. Artists are not the product of mechanical training, but the out-come of inherent genius. One cannot be an artist unless one possess the artistic talent. To be a real mathematician, one must have a mathematical turn of mind. To enter the realm of music, one must be musical. To enter the realm of art, one must have an artist's soul. And to enter the kingdom of God, one must have a godly or spiritual nature, and the only way to acquire this is by being born again. Hence, "Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again" (Joh 3:7). It is self-evident. It is a logical as well as an imperative necessity. It is a requirement which follows a universal law. Take the purest woman to heaven who has never been regenerated, and she would be miserable. She cannot really enjoy a spiritual prayer meeting now, much less could she enjoy heaven. She prefers the social gathering, the dance, the picture show, and if she is deprived of them, she is discontented, and if she is compelled to spend an hour in the company of godly people, she is wretched.

C. Man Is Totally Depraved

The new birth is an imperative necessity, because man is totally depraved. Every member of Adam's race is a fallen creature, and every part of our complex being has been corrupted by sin. Man's heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked, his mind is blinded and darkened, and his thoughts are only evil continually. His reasonings are un-sound, his affections are prostituted, and his will is alienated from God. He is without righteousness, under the curse of the law, and in bondage to sin and Satan; truly his case is desperate and his condition deplorable. He cannot better himself, for there dwelleth no good thing in him. He cannot work out his salvation for he is "without strength." He cannot live a better life, for he is dead in trespasses and sins. He needs, then, to be born of God. "For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creature" (Gal 6:15).

Man is a fallen creature. It is not that a few leaves have faded, but that the entire tree has become rotten, root and branch. There is in every one that which is radically wrong. The word "radical," comes from a Latin word which means "the root" so that when we say a man is radically wrong, we mean that there is in him, in the very root and fiber of his being, that which is intrinsically corrupt and incurably evil. Sins are merely the fruit;

there must of necessity be a root from which springs the fruit. We sin because we are sinful by nature; we are sinful by nature because we are fallen creatures. It follows, then, as a natural consequence, that man needs the aid of a Higher Power to effect a radical change. There is only One who can effect the change. God created man, and God alone can re-create him. Hence the imperative demand, "Ye must be born again."

D. Nothing Else Can Take the Place of the New Birth

The new birth is a necessity because nothing else can take its place. There is no substitute for it. Education cannot take the place of the new birth. Education is simply the training of the natural man. Education can cultivate, but it cannot create. This should be apparent from the analogy furnished by the physical realm. Capacities which are missing at birth cannot afterwards be supplied by the extra cultivation of others. The sense of touch may be trained to a high degree of proficiency, but it cannot give sight. Hearing may be developed to the utmost acuteness, but it will not give the sense of taste or smell. Neither is it possible to produce a spiritual nature by the cultivation of the flesh. Nature maybe educated to the highest standard attainable, but it cannot be developed into something of a totally different order. There is no process by which a man may be developed out of a horse; nor a beast out of a bird. So also between the natural and the spiritual a wide gulf is fixed. "That which is born of the flesh is flesh," and it never becomes anything else. But, "that which is born of the Spirit is spirit." A spiritual nature is the result of a spiritual birth, and not the outcome of cultivating the natural man.

Reformation cannot take the place of the new birth. Reformation has to do with a man's habits, and not the man himself. If the works of my watch are out of order, no altering of the hands or polishing of the case will make it keep correct time—the trouble is inside. So it is with the sinner. A man may be correct in his deportment, clean in his habits and punctilious in his dealings, and still be dead in trespasses and sins. To one of the Pharisees, our Lord said: "Now do ye Pharisees make clean the outside of the cup and the platter; but your inward part is full of ravening and wickedness" (Luk 11:39). So it is with reformers. No amount of reformation can change the heart. "It is the Spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing" (Joh 6:63). I may gather some weeds out of a field and transplant them in my garden: I may fertilize and irrigate them, but no amount of attention will transform them into rose bushes. So a new environment will not change man's sinful nature. He needs to be born "of God."

Religion cannot take the place of the new birth. Spurgeon said: "It is difficult to say how far a man may go in religion and yet die in his sins." The Pharisees read the Scriptures, fasted oft, gave tithes, and made long prayers, and yet they rejected the counsel of God. It is possible to have one's name inscribed upon a church register, and yet not have it written in the Lamb's book of life. No performance of religious duties can take the place of the new birth. How many there are who rely upon the fact that they say their prayers, read their Bibles, attend church, and partake of the Lord's Supper, but who, nevertheless, are building upon the sand, rather than the Rock which is Christ!

The need of the new birth is universal. It was not to the woman taken in adultery, nor the thief on the cross, that our Lord said: "Ye must be born again," but to Nicodemus, a Pharisee, a teacher in Israel, a man of unblemished character. Unless Nicodemus was "born again," he could not enter the kingdom of God. Neither can you! Mark well, then, the Lord's words: "Marvel not that I said unto thee, ye must be born again."

Sinner, in a little while at most you will be lying upon your deathbed (if deathbed you have). Then, it will matter nothing how large the fortune you have accumulated, how considerable the learning you may have acquired, nor how great the popularity or fame to which you may have attained; all that will matter then will be, Have you been "born again?"

Should any reader be exercised in soul, and led to inquire, "How can I be born again? How can I find Christ?" the best answer that we can give is contained in the words of the Lord Jesus when He said: "Search the Scriptures...they are they which testify of Me" (Joh 5:39).

3. The Author of the New Birth

The new birth is due to a sovereign act of God. We have no more to do with our second birth than we had with our first. It is entirely the work of the Holy Spirit. This fact is clearly set forth in John 1:13: "Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God." Let us briefly examine this verse in detail.

A. The New Birth Is Not a Matter of Heredity

Salvation does not run in the blood. Natural descent cannot account for this supernatural phenomenon. There were those in our Lord's earthly ministry who boasted that they were the descendants of Abraham. But He said unto them: "Think not to say within yourselves, we have Abraham to our father." Many a good man has had a bad son, and many a bad father has had a good child. Isaac was the one of whom it was said: "In Isaac shall thy seed be called," yet he begat Esau who was a profane person. Eli, the high priest, was a real man of God, yet his sons Hophni and Phinehas were slain by the Lord for their wickedness. David was a man after God's own heart, but his sons were idolaters. On the other hand, Jonathan was born of Saul who, subsequently, became possessed of an evil spirit; while Amnon, one of the worst of Israel's kings, begat the godly Josiah. Salvation, then, does not run in the veins.

B. The New Birth Is Not a Product of the Sinner's Will

Regeneration does not come by human resolution or effort: it is not the outcome of carnal volition or activity. Water never rises above its own level; so man's own will which is alienated from God, never moves toward God until the man has been renewed. "So then it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that showeth mercy" (Rom 9:16). "Ye have not the will to come to Me, that ye might have life" (Greek) said Christ (Joh 5:40). "No man can come to Me, except the Father which hath sent Me draw him" (Joh 6:44). The new birth, then, is not the outcome of the will of the flesh.

C. The New Birth Is Not the Fruit of a Preacher's Persuasive Powers

We would that some of our modern evangelists might realize this. It is to be feared that not a few of the so-called conversions in our day are but the product of a species of hypnotism. This attempt to force a decision by pressure and persuasion is expressly repudiated by the above Scripture. The new birth is "not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man." While it is the business of the preacher to beseech men to be reconciled to God, yet he cannot make the unwilling willing. The old saying is true: "Any man may lead a horse to the water, but no ten men can make him drink." To change the sinner from unwilling to willing is the work of the Holy Spirit. Our work is to preach the Word and leave the results entirely to God, who alone "giveth the increase."

*"We may listen to the preacher, God's own truth be clearly shown;
But we need a greater teacher, From the everlasting throne.
Application is the work of God alone."*

D. The New Birth Is of God

This is self-evident. If the new birth is the communication of the divine nature, then God Himself must be the Author of this work. God alone is the Author and giver of life, and He bestows His gifts as He pleases, and quickens dead souls according to His own sovereign pleasure. Accordingly it is written, "Of His own will begat He us with the Word of Truth" (Jam 1:18).

4. The Instrument of the New Birth

How is the new birth brought about? What are the means which God uses to accomplish it? What is the instrument which the Holy Spirit employs to effect regeneration? We shall again briefly consider the negative side before we turn to the positive answer.

A. The New Birth Is Not Effected by Any Religious Ordinance

There are not wanting those who seek to discriminate between works and the use of an ordinance. While repudiating the former as a cause of the new birth, they, nevertheless, attribute it to the waters of baptism. Appeal is sometimes made to John 3:5 in support of this theory—"Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit he cannot enter the kingdom of God." It would be beside our present purpose to enter into a lengthy examination of this verse; instead, we shall content ourselves with one or two brief remarks thereon. We would affirm that, first "water" is used here figuratively. This must not be considered a begging of the question, for John elsewhere employs this word in a similar manner. "Jesus answered and said unto her, Whosoever drinketh of this water shall thirst again; but whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst" (Joh 4:13, 14). And again, "Jesus stood and cried, saying, If any man thirst, let him come unto Me, and drink. He that believeth on Me, as the Scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water" (Joh 7:37, 38). In neither of these passages can

“water” be understood literally. Second, “water,” we believe, is used in John 3:5 as an emblem of the written Word. In substantiation of this, we would refer our readers to John 15:3, “Now ye are clean through the Word which I have spoken unto you.” Because the Word cleanses, water is a suitable emblem of it. Further, we read in Ephesians 5:25, 26: “Christ also loved the church, and gave Himself for it; that He might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the Word.” Third, “water” in John 3:5 cannot signify baptism, for there are many baptized people in our churches who give no evidence of having been regenerated. Regeneration is an internal work, but how can an external ordinance accomplish such an end?

B. The New Birth Is Effected by the Word of God Applied by the Holy Spirit

“For in Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the Gospel” (1Co 4:15). The apostle went from place to place preaching the Gospel of God’s grace and as it found lodgment in hearts which had been prepared by the Holy Spirit brought them from death unto life. In Philippians 2:16, the Scriptures are termed “The Word of Life,” because they alone are capable of quickening those who are dead in trespasses and sins. Said our Lord Jesus Christ, “The words that I speak unto you they are spirit, and they are life.” An illustration of this was furnished in the resurrection of Lazarus. As our Lord stood before the tomb, He cried, “Lazarus, come forth,” and His words were demonstrated to be spirit and life. Jesus Christ is still performing the same miracle in the spiritual realm: “Verily, verily, I say unto you, The hour is coming, and now is, when the dead [in trespasses and sins] shall hear the voice of the Son of God and they that hear shall live” (Joh 5:25).

It is not by persuasive words of man’s wisdom, nor by touching anecdotes which appeal to the emotions, that dead souls are born again, but by the Word of the living God. “Of His own will begat He us, with the Word of Truth” (Jam 1:18). “Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the Word of God, which liveth and abideth forever” (1Pe 1:23). Oh, that more of our preachers would follow the example of Ezekiel, and say unto the dead bones all around them, “Hear the Word of the LORD” (Eze 37:4), then should we see the miracle of spiritual resurrection occurring more often than we now do. Believe and preach the Word of God, for by it, and it alone, are dead souls born again.

5. Evidences of the New Birth

What fruits shall we look for in those who have been regenerated? What are the marks of the new birth? How may I know that I have passed from death unto life? These are most important questions, and ought to engage the serious attention of all earnest inquirers after truth. What are the evidences of the new birth? We shall attempt to furnish a detailed answer.

A. Personal Faith in the Lord Jesus Christ

“He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life” (Joh 3:36). “Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth My Word, and believeth on Him that sent Me, hath everlasting

life, and shall not come into condemnation; but has [Greek] passed from death unto life” (Joh 5:24). “Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ has been [Greek] born of God” (1Jo 5:1). In these passages, we learn that those who believe in the Lord Jesus are already in possession of eternal life, which is only another way of saying that they have previously been regenerated. Wherever there is a real reposing on Christ for salvation, there is clear evidence of the new birth. If you have abandoned all hope of being saved by your own works, if you have rejected the filthy rags of your own righteousness as the ground of acceptance with God; if you have come as a lost, helpless sinner to Christ and have cried unto Him for mercy and are depending on Him alone for salvation, it is proof that you have already been born again. Just as a baby instinctively clings to its mother, so the newborn babe of God clings, in its helplessness, to the Saviour.

B. Genuine Repentance for Sin

In theological works, repentance is usually treated before faith, for this is the Gospel order—repent and believe—“Repent and be converted that your sins may be blotted out.” But for our present purpose, we reverse the order. There is a difference between repentance in a sinner and repentance in a Christian. In the unregenerate, repentance is the abhorrence of self, the realization of my ruined condition, the taking of the place of a lost sinner before God. But with the believer repentance is an hatred of sin and a grief of heart whenever he is overtaken by it. In the believer, “godly sorrow worketh repentance.” But “godly sorrow” implies that I have the divine nature within me, and this no sinner has. Repentance is more than sorrow for sin, it is a “godly sorrow.” Many a criminal lying in our penitentiaries has the former, but none save the children of God experience the latter. I repent not because I am fearful of or miserable in the punishment of my wrongdoing, but because I know that sin is hateful to God and grievous in His sight. Repentance is more than an act; it is an attitude. Repentance is taking sides with God and against sin. In a sentence then: God is Holy and hates sin and if I am His child, I have His holy nature within me, and consequently I shrink from sin and grieve over it when I am guilty of its commission.

C. Real Love for God

God is holy, and having His nature within us, we hate sin. But this is merely a negative thing. God is love, and having been begotten by Him, we love the One who is our Father. Here is the positive principle in regeneration. “God is love; and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him” (1Jo 4:16). It is the normal condition for children to love their parents, and we repeat, those who have been born again will love the One who has begotten them. But how may we know whether or not we love God? Surely, the question is unnecessary. We cannot truly love anybody without our being conscious of the fact. If we love God, our affections have been drawn out toward Him.

His excellency has won our hearts. We can now say with the Psalmist, “Whom have I in heaven but Thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire beside Thee” (Psa 73:25).

Moreover, if we love God, our chief desire will be to please Him. Said our Lord, “If ye love Me, keep My commandments.”

“Love is of God; and everyone that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God. He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love” (1Jo 4:7, 8) which is only another way of expressing the thought of the previous paragraph. Observe the order—love precedes the knowledge of God. In the human realm, we have to know a person before we love him, but God has to be loved before He is known. God is known by the heart and not by the head. “The fool hath said in his heart there is no God.” Have I then a real love for God? Do I see in Him every beauty that I should desire Him? Is my meditation of Him “sweet”? Is He the One before whom I bow in adoring worship? If so, this is an evidence that I have been born again.

D. Love for the Brethren

“Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God” (1Jo 4:7). God is love, and if I have His nature within me I shall love His children—love them all, irrespective of their social standing, their intellectual attainments, their denominational affiliation; love them whether they be black or white, rich or poor, cultured or illiterate. In the human realm, it is the normal condition for members of the same family to love each other. A tie of blood binds their hearts together. So it is in measure, and so it ought to be without limitation, in the family of God. His children, also, are united by blood tie—the blood of Christ, in which all believers have a common interest. In the early days of the Christian era, it was a customary thing for the pagans to say of the saints: “See how they love one another!”

How is this love to be manifested? “But whoso hath this world’s good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him? My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth” (1Jo 3:17, 18). If I love my brethren in Christ, I must seek to defend their characters, promote their interests, minister to their need, and seek their well-being.

E. Life of Practical Righteousness

A tree is known by its fruits. Faith is evidenced by its works. A godly nature manifests itself in a godly life. “If ye know that He is righteous, ye know that every one that doeth righteousness is born of Him” (1Jo 2:29). One evidence that we have been born again is the performance of righteousness. The unregenerate are termed “children of disobedience.” They have no respect for God’s law, they refuse to submit themselves to His authority, they are more concerned about their own interests than they are with the glory of God. But those who have been begotten by the Spirit “yield their members as instruments of righteousness” and God’s Word. They recognize that they are no more their own, but have been bought with a price. They have been “created in Christ Jesus unto good works” (Eph 2:10). Therefore they pray that the fruit of the Spirit may adorn their lives. Again, it is written, “For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world: and this

is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith” (1Jo 5:4). The believer’s life is not regulated by the fashions, methods, maxims, and pursuits of the world, but by Christ who has left us an example that we should follow His steps.

F. Growth in Grace

Stagnation breeds disease and death. A limb that is never used becomes paralyzed. Life evidences itself by growth, hence we are exhorted, “As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the Word, that ye may grow thereby” (1Pe 2:2). As we feed upon the Bread of life, our spiritual nature is developed and the inward man is renewed day by day. As we live by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of the Lord, we become strong in His strength and the power of His might. The life of the regenerate is a going on from strength to strength and from glory to glory. “The path of the just...shineth more and more unto the perfect day” (Pro 4:18). Here, then, is our standard of measurement. Are we becoming more Christlike? Are we “growing in grace and in the knowledge of the Lord”? If so, it is an evidence that we are numbered among the children of God.

G. Steady Perseverance to the End

Here is a fundamental difference between professors and genuine believers. There is a class of people who “hear the Word, and anon with joy receive it; yet have they no root in themselves, but dureth for a while: for when tribulation or persecution ariseth because of the Word, by and by they are offended,” (Mat 13:20, 21). But these people have never been regenerated. The divine nature has never been imparted to them, consequently they have “no root” in them. They are like washed sows, which sooner or later, return to their wallowing in the mire. In contrast with them, God’s children “hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm unto the end.” They may fall, but they are not utterly cast down (Psa 37:24). They may, like Peter, backslide, but, like Peter, they shall go out and weep bitterly, and be restored. He that has been born again has been made a partaker of the divine nature (2Pe 1:4); and God is eternal, therefore shall they never perish. At the close of his earthly pilgrimage, every regenerated soul shall be able to say, in measure at least, “For I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, shall give me at that day; and not to me only, but unto all them also that love His appearing” (2Ti 4:6-8). ∞

Regeneration

Two chief obstacles lie in the way of the salvation of any of Adam's fallen descendants: bondage to the guilt and penalty of sin, bondage to the power and presence of sin; or, in other words, their being bound for hell and their being unfit for heaven. These obstacles are, so far as man is concerned, entirely insurmountable. This fact was unequivocally established by Christ, when, in answer to His disciples' question, "Who then can be saved?", He answered, "with men this is impossible." A lost sinner might more easily create a world than save his own soul. "But" (forever be His name praised), the Lord Jesus went on to say, "with God all things are possible" (Mat 19:25-26). Yes, problems which completely baffle human wisdom, are solvable by Omniscience; tasks which defy the utmost efforts of man, are easily accomplished by Omnipotence. Nowhere is this fact more strikingly exemplified than in God's saving of the sinner.

Introduction

As intimated above, two things are absolutely essential in order to salvation: deliverance from the guilt and penalty of sin, deliverance from the power and presence of sin. The one is secured by the mediatorial work of Christ, the other is accomplished by the effectual operations of the Holy Spirit. The one is the blessed result of what the Lord Jesus did for God's people; the other is the glorious consequence of what the Holy Spirit does in God's people. The one takes place when, having been brought to lie in the dust as an empty-handed beggar, faith is enabled to lay hold of Christ, God now justifies from all things, and the trembling, penitent, but believing sinner receives a free and full pardon. The other takes place gradually, in distinct stages, under the divine blessings of regeneration, sanctification, and glorification. In regeneration, indwelling sin receives its death-wound, though not its death. In sanctification, the regenerated soul is shown the sink of corruption that dwells within, and is taught to loathe and hate himself. At glorification both soul and body will be forever delivered from every vestige and effect of sin.

Now a vital and saving knowledge of these divine truths cannot be acquired by a mere study of them. No amount of pouring over the Scriptures, no painstaking examination of the soundest doctrinal treatises, no exercise of the intellect, is able to secure the slightest spiritual insight into them. True, the diligent seeker may attain a natural knowledge, an intellectual apprehension of them, just as one born blind may obtain a notional knowledge of the colorings of the flowers or of the beauties of a sunset; but the natural man can no more arrive at a spiritual knowledge of spiritual things, than a blind man can a true knowledge of natural things, yea, than a man in his grave can know what is going on in the world he has left. Nor can anything short of divine power bring the proud heart to a felt realization of this humbling fact; only as God supernaturally en-

lightens, is any soul made conscious of the awful spiritual darkness in which it naturally dwells.

The truth of what has just been said is established by the plain and solemn declaration of 1 Corinthians 2:14, "But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned." Alas that so many evade the sharp point of this verse by imagining that it applies not to them, mistaking an intellectual assent to spiritual things for an experimental acquaintance of them. An external knowledge of divine truth, as revealed in Scripture, may charm the mind and form ground for speculation and conversation, but unless there is a divine application of them to the conscience and heart, such knowledge will be of no more avail in the hour of death than the pleasing images of our dreams are of any satisfaction when we awake. How awful to think that multitudes of professing Christians will awaken in hell to discover that their knowledge of divine truth was no more substantial than a dream!

While it be true that no man by searching can find out God (Job 11:7), and that the mysteries of His kingdom are sealed secrets until He deigns to reveal them to the soul (Mat 13:11), nevertheless, it is also true that God is pleased to use means in the conveyance of heavenly light to our sin-darkened understandings. It is for this reason that He commissions His servants to preach the Word, and, by voice and pen, expound the Scriptures; nevertheless, their labors will produce no eternal fruits unless He condescends to bless the seed they sow and give it an increase. Thus, no matter how faithfully, simply, helpfully a sermon be preached or an article written, unless the Spirit applies it to the heart, the hearer or reader is no spiritual gainer. Then will you not humbly entreat God to open your heart to receive whatever is according to His holy Word in this small booklet?

In what follows, we shall, as God enables, seek to direct attention to what we have referred to at the beginning of this booklet as the second of those two humanly insurmountable obstacles which lie in the way of a sinner's salvation, and that is, the fitting of him for heaven, by the delivering of him from the power and presence of sin. Such a work is a divine one, and therefore it is miraculous. Regeneration is no mere outward reformation, no mere turning over a new leaf and endeavoring to live a better life. The new birth is very much more than going forward and taking the preacher's hand. It is a supernatural operation of God upon man's spirit, a transcendent wonder. All of God's works are wonderful. The world in which we live is filled with things which amaze us. Physical birth is a marvel, but, from several standpoints, the new birth is more remarkable. It is a marvel of divine grace, divine wisdom, divine power, and divine beauty. It is a miracle performed upon and within ourselves, of which we may be personally cognizant; it will prove an eternal marvel.

Because regeneration is the work of God, it is a mysterious thing. All God's works are shrouded in impenetrable mystery. Life, natural life, in its origin, in its nature, its processes, baffles the most careful investigator. Much more is this the case with spiritual

life. The Existence and Being of God transcends the finite grasp; how then can we expect to understand the process by which we become His children? Our Lord Himself declared that the new birth is a thing of mystery: "The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit" (Joh 3:8). The wind is something about which the most learned scientist knows next to nothing. Its nature, the laws which govern it, the causation, all lie beyond the purview of human inquiry. So it is with the new birth: it is profoundly mysterious.

Regeneration is an intensely solemn thing. The new birth is the dividing line between heaven and hell. In God's sight there are but two classes of people on this earth: those who are dead in sins, and those who are walking in newness of life. In the physical realm there is no such thing as being between life and death. A man is either dead or alive. The vital spark may be very dim, but while it exists, life is present. Let that spark go out altogether, and though you may dress the body in beautiful clothes, nevertheless, it is nothing more than a corpse. So it is in the spiritual realm. We are either saints or sinners, spiritually alive or spiritually dead, children of God or children of the devil. In view of this solemn fact, how momentous is the question, Have I been born again? If not, and you die in your present state, you will wish you had never been born at all.

1. Its Necessity

A. Natural degeneration

The need for regeneration lies in our natural degeneration. In consequence of the fall of our first parents, all of us were born alienated from the divine life and holiness, despoiled of all those perfections wherewith man's nature was at first endowed. Ezekiel 16:4-5 gives a graphic picture of the terrible spiritual plight at our entrance into this world: cast out to the loathing of our persons, rolling ourselves in our own filth, impotent to help ourselves. That "likeness" of God (Gen 1:26) which was at first stamped on man's soul, has been effaced, aversion from God and an inordinate love of the creature having displaced it. The very fountain of our beings is polluted, continually sending forth bitter springs, and though those streams take several courses and wander in various channels, yet are they all brackish. Therefore the "sacrifice" of the wicked is an abomination to the LORD (Pro 15:8), and his very plowing "sin" (Pro 21:4).

There are but two states, and all men are included therein: the one a state of spiritual life, the other a state of spiritual death; the one a state of righteousness, the other a state of sin; the one saving, the other damning; the one a state of enmity, wherein men have their inclinations contrary to God, the other a state of friendship and fellowship, wherein men walk obediently unto God, and would not willingly have an inward notion opposed to His will. The one state is called darkness, the other light: "For ye were [in your unregenerate days, not only in the dark, but] sometimes darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord" (Eph 5:8). There is no medium between these conditions: all are in one of them. Each man and woman now on earth is either an object of God's delight or of His abomi-

nation. The most benevolent and imposing works of the flesh cannot please Him, but the faintest sparks proceeding from that which grace hath kindled are acceptable in His sight.

By the fall man contracted an unfitness to that which is good. Shapen in iniquity and conceived in sin (Psa 51:5), man is a “transgressor from the womb” (Isa 48:8): “they go astray as soon as they be born, speaking lies” (Psa 58:3), and “the imagination of man’s heart is evil from his youth” (Gen 8:21). He may be civilized, educated, refined, and even religious, but at heart he is “desperately wicked” (Jer 17:9), and all that he does is vile in the sight of God, for nothing is done from love to Him, and with a view to His glory. “A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit” (Mat 7:18). Until they are born again, all men are “unto every good work reprobate” (Ti 1:16).

By the fall man contracted an unwillingness to that which is good. All motions of the will in its fallen estate; through defect of a right principle from whence they flow and a right end to which they tend, are only evil and sinful. Leave man to himself, remove from him all the restraints which law and order impose, and he will swiftly degenerate to a lower level than the beasts, as almost any missionary will testify. And is human nature any better in civilized lands? Not a whit. Wash off the artificial veneer and it will be found that “as in water face answereth to face, so the heart of man to man” (Pro 27:19). The world over, it remains solemnly true that “the carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be” (Rom 8:7). Christ will prefer the same charge in a coming day as when He was here on earth: “Men loved darkness rather than light” (Joh 3:19). Men will not come to Him that they might have “life.”

By the fall man contracted an inability to that which is good. He is not only unfitted and unwilling, but unable to do that which is good. Where is the man that can truthfully say he has measured up to his own ideals? All have to acknowledge there is a strange force within dragging them downward, inclining them to evil, which, notwithstanding their utmost endeavors against it, in some form or other, more or less, conquers them. Despite the kindly exhortations of friends, the faithful warnings of God’s servants, the solemn examples of suffering and sorrow, disease and death on every side, and the vote of their own conscience, yet they yield. “They that are in the flesh [in their natural condition] cannot please God” (Rom 8:8).

Thus it is evident that the need is imperative for a radical and revolutionary change to be wrought in fallen man before he can have any fellowship with the thrice holy God. Since the earth must be completely changed, because of the curse now resting on it, before it can ever again bring forth fruit as it did when man was in a state of innocence; so must man, since a general defilement from Adam has seized upon him, be renewed, before he can “bring forth fruit unto God” (Rom 7:4). He must be grafted upon another stock, united to Christ, partake of the power of His resurrection: without this he may bring forth fruit, but not “unto God.” How can any one turn to God without a principle

of spiritual motion? How can he live to God who has no spiritual life? How can he be fit for the kingdom of God who is of a brutish and diabolical nature?

B. Total depravity

The need for regeneration lies in man's total depravity. Every member of Adam's race is a fallen creature, and every part of his complex being has been corrupted by sin. Man's heart is "deceitful above all things and desperately wicked" (Jer 17:9). His mind is blinded by Satan (2Co 4:4) and darkened by sin (Eph 4:18), so that his thoughts are only evil continually (Gen 6:5). His affections are prostituted, so that he loves what God hates, and hates what God loves. His will is enslaved from good (Rom 6:20) and opposed to God (Rom 8:7). He is without righteousness (Rom 3:10), under the curse of the law (Gal 3:10) and is the captive of the devil. His condition is truly deplorable, and his case desperate. He cannot better himself, for he is "without strength" (Rom 5:6). He cannot work out his salvation, for there dwelleth no good thing in him (Rom 7:18). He needs, then, to be born of God, "for in Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creature" (Gal 6:15).

Man is a fallen creature. It is not that a few leaves have faded, but that the entire tree has become rotten, root and branch. There is in every one that which is radically wrong. The word "radical" comes from a Latin one which means "the root," so that when we say a man is radically wrong, we mean that there is in him, in the very foundation and fiber of his being, that which is intrinsically corrupt and essentially evil. Sins are merely the fruit, there must of necessity be a root from which they spring. It follows, then, as an inevitable consequence that man needs the aid of a Higher Power to effect a radical change in him. There is only One who can effect that change: God created man, and God alone can re-create him. Hence the imperative demand, "Ye must be born again" (Joh 3:7). Man is spiritually dead and naught but almighty power can make him alive.

"By one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men" (Rom 5:12). In the day that Adam ate of the forbidden fruit, he died spiritually, and a person who is spiritually dead cannot beget a child who possesses spiritual life. Therefore, all by natural descent enter this world "alienated from the life of God" (Eph 4:18), "dead in trespasses and sins" (Eph 2:1). This is no mere figure of speech, but a solemn fact. Every child is born entirely destitute of a single spark of spiritual life, and therefore if ever it is to enter the kingdom of God, which is the realm of spiritual life (Rom 14:17), it must be born into it.

The more clearly we are enabled to discern the imperative need of regeneration and the various reasons why it is absolutely essential in order to a fallen creature being fitted for the presence of the thrice holy God, the less difficulty are we likely to encounter when we endeavor to arrive at an understanding of the nature of regeneration, what it is which takes place within a person when the Holy Spirit renews him. For this reason particularly, and also because such a cloud of error has been cast upon this vital truth, we feel that a further consideration of this particular aspect of our subject is needed.

Jesus Christ came into this world to glorify God and to glorify Himself by redeeming a people unto Himself. But what glory can we conceive that God has, and what glory would accrue to Christ, if there be not a vital and fundamental difference between His people and the world? And what difference can there be between those two companies but in a change of heart, out of which are the issues of life (Pro 4:23): a change of nature or disposition, as the fountain from which all other differences must proceed—sheep and goats differ in nature. The whole mediatorial work of Christ has this one end in view. His priestly office is to reconcile and bring His people unto God; His prophetic, to teach them the way; His kingly, to work in them those qualifications and bestow upon them that comeliness which is necessary to fit them for the holy converse and communion with the thrice holy God. Thus does He “purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works” (Ti 2:14).

“Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived” (1Co 6:9). But multitudes are deceived, and deceived at this very point, and on this most momentous matter. God has warned men that “the heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked” (Jer 17:9), but few will believe that this is true of them. Instead, tens of thousands of professing Christians are filled with a vain and presumptuous confidence that all is well with them. They delude themselves with hopes of mercy while continuing to live in a course of self-will and self-pleasing. They fancy they are fitted for heaven, while every day that passes finds them the more prepared for hell. It is written of the Lord Jesus that “he shall save his people from their sins” (Mat 1:21), and not in their sins: save them not only from the penalty, but also from the power and pollution of sin.

To how many in Christendom do these solemn words apply, “For he flattereth himself in his own eyes, until his iniquity be found to be hateful” (Psa 36:2). The principle device of Satan is to deceive people into imagining that they can successfully combine the world with God, allow the flesh while pretending to the Spirit, and thus “make the best of both worlds.” But Christ has emphatically declared that “no man can serve two masters” (Mat 6:24). Many mistake the force of those searching words: the true emphasis is not upon “two,” but upon “serve”—none can serve two masters. And God requires to be “served”—feared, submitted unto, obeyed; His will regulating the life in all its details, see 1 Samuel 12:24-25. “Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve” (Mat 4:10).

C. Man’s unsuitedness to God

The need for regeneration lies in man’s unsuitedness to God. When Nicodemus, a respectable and religious Pharisee, yea, a “master in Israel,” came to Christ, He told him plainly that “except a man be born again” he could neither see nor enter the “kingdom of God” (Joh 3:3, 5)—either the Gospel-state on earth or the Glory-state in heaven. None can enter the spiritual realm unless he has a spiritual nature, which alone gives him an appetite for and capacity to enjoy the things pertaining to it; and this, the natural man has not. So far from it, he cannot so much as “discern” them (1Co 2:14). He has no love

for them, nor desire after them (Joh 3:19). Nor can he desire them for his will is enslaved by the lusts of the flesh (Eph 2:2-3). Therefore, before a man can enter the spiritual kingdom, his understanding must be supernaturally enlightened, his heart renewed, and his will emancipated.

There can be no point of contact between God and His Christ with a sinful man until he is regenerated. There can be no lawful union between two parties who have nothing vital in common. A superior and an inferior nature may be united together, but never contrary natures. Can fire and water be united, a beast and a man, a good angel and vile devil? Can heaven and hell ever meet on friendly terms? In all friendship there must be a similarity of disposition; before there can be communion there must be some agreement or oneness. Beasts and men agree not in a life of reason, and therefore cannot converse together. God and men agree not in a life of holiness, and therefore can have no communion together (*Condensed from Stephen Charnock, 1628-1680*).

We are united to the “first Adam” by a likeness of nature; how then can we be united to the “last Adam” without a likeness to Him from a new nature or principle? We were united to the first Adam by a living soul, we must be united to the last Adam by a quickening Spirit. We have nothing to do with the heavenly Adam without bearing an heavenly image (1Co 15:48-49). If we are His members, we must have the same nature which was communicated to Him, the Head, by the Spirit of God, which is holiness (Luk 1:35). There must be one “spirit” in both: thus it is written, “he that is joined unto the Lord is one spirit” (1Co 6:17). And again God tells us, “If any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his” (Rom 8:9). Nor can anything be vitally united to another without life. A living head and a dead body is inconceivable.

There can be no communion with God without a renewed soul. God is unable on His part, with honor to His law and holiness, to have fellowship with such a creature as fallen man. Man is incapable on his part, because of the aversion rooted in his fallen nature. Then how is it possible for God and man to be brought together without the latter experiencing a thorough change of nature? What communion can there be between Light and darkness, between the living God and a dead heart? “Can two walk together, except they be agreed?” (Amo 3:3). God loathes sin, man loves it; God loves holiness, man loathes it. How then could such contrary affections meet together in an amicable friendship? Sin has alienated from the life of God (Eph 4:18), and therefore from His fellowship; life, then, must be restored to us before we can be instated in communion with Him. Old things must pass away, and all things become new (2Co 5:17).

Gospel-duties cannot be performed without regeneration. The first requirement of Christ from His followers is that they shall deny self. But that is impossible to fallen human nature, for men are “lovers of their own selves” (2Ti 3:2). Not until the soul is renewed, will self be repudiated. Therefore is the new-covenant promise, “I will take the stony heart out of their flesh, and will give them an heart of flesh” (Eze 11:19). All Gospel duties require a pliability and tenderness of heart. Pride was the condemnation of the devil (1Ti 3:6), and our first parents fell through swelling designs to be like unto God

(Gen 3:5). Ever since then, man has been too aspiring and too well opinionated of himself to perform duties in an evangelical strain, with that nothingness in himself which the Gospel requires. The chief design of the Gospel is to beat down all glorying in ourselves, that we should glory only in the Lord (1Co 1:29-31); but this is not possible till grace renews the heart, melts it before God, and molds it to His requirements.

Without a new nature we cannot perform Gospel-duties constantly. "They that are after the flesh do mind the things of the flesh" (Rom 8:5). Such a mind cannot long be employed upon spiritual things. Prickings of conscience, terrors of hell, fears of death, may exert a temporary influence, but they do not last. Stony-ground may bring forth blades, yet for lack of root they quickly wither away (Mat 13:20). A stone may be flung high into the air, but ultimately it falls back to the earth; so the natural man may for a time mount high in religious fervor, but sooner or later it shall be said of him, as it was of Israel, "their heart was not right with him, neither were they stedfast in his covenant" (Psa 78:37). Many seem to begin in the Spirit, but end in the flesh. Only where God has wrought in the soul, will the work last forever (Ecc 3:14; Phi 1:6).

As regeneration is indispensably necessary to a Gospel-state, so it is to a state of heavenly glory.

It seems to be typified by the strength and freshness of the Israelites when they entered into Canaan. Not a decrepit and infirm person set foot in the promised land: none of those that came out of Egypt with an Egyptian nature, and desires for the garlic and onions thereof, with a suffering to their old bondage, but dropped their carcasses in the wilderness; only the two spies who had encouraged them against the seeming difficulties. None that retain only the old man, born in the house of bondage; but only a new regenerate creature, shall enter into the heavenly Canaan. Heaven is the inheritance of the sanctified, not of the filthy: "that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and an inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in me" (Act 26:18). Upon Adam's expulsion from paradise, a flaming sword was set to stop his reentering into that place of happiness. As Adam, in his forlorn state, could not possess it, we also, by what we have received from Adam, cannot expect a greater privilege than our root. The priest under the law could not enter into the sanctuary till he was purified, nor the people into the congregation: neither can any man have access into the Holiest till he be sprinkled by the blood of Jesus, Hebrews 10:22 (S. Charnock).

Heaven is a prepared place for a prepared people. Said Christ, "I go to prepare a place for you" (Joh 14:2). For whom? For those who have, in heart, "forsaken all" to follow Him (Mat 19:27). For those who love God (1Co 2:9), love the things of God: they perceive the inestimable value and beauty of spiritual things. And they who really love spiritual things, deem no sacrifice too great to win them (Phi 3:8). But in order to love spiritual things, the man himself must be made spiritual. The natural man may hear about them and have a correct idea of the doctrine of them, but he receives them not spiritually in the love of them (2Th 2:10), and finds not his joy and happiness in them. But the renewed soul longs after them, not by constraint, but because God has won his heart. His

confession is, “Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire beside thee” (Psa 73:25). God has become his chief good, His will his only rule, His glory his chief end. In such an one, the very inclinations of the soul have been changed.

The man himself must be changed before he is prepared for heaven. Of the regenerate it is written, “giving thanks unto the Father, which hath made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light” (Col 1:12). None are “made meet” while they are unholy, for it is the inheritance of the saints; none are fitted for it while they are under the power of darkness, for it is an inheritance in light. Christ Himself ascended not to heaven to take possession of His glory till after His resurrection from the dead, nor can we enter heaven unless we have been resurrected from sin. “He that hath wrought [polished] us for the selfsame thing [to be clothed with our heavenly house] is God,” and the proof that He has done this is, the giving unto us “the earnest of the Spirit” (2Co 5:5); and where the Spirit of the Lord is, “there is liberty” (2Co 3:17), liberty from the power of indwelling sin, as the verse which follows clearly shows.

“Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God” (Mat 5:8). To “see” God is to be introduced into the most intimate intercourse with Him. It is to have that “thick cloud” of our transgressions blotted out (Isa 44:22), for it was our iniquities which separated between us and our God (Isa 59:2). To “see” God, here has the force of enjoy, as in John 3:36. But for this enjoyment a “pure heart” is indispensable. Now the heart is purified by faith (Act 15:9), for faith has to do with God. Thus, a “pure heart” is one that has its affections set upon things above, being attracted by “the beauty of holiness” (Psa 96:9). But how could he enjoy God who cannot now endure the imperfect holiness of His children, but rails against it as unnecessary “strictness” or puritanic fanaticism? God’s face is only to be beheld in righteousness.

“Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord” (Heb 12:14). None can dwell with God and be eternally happy in His presence unless a radical change has been wrought in him, a change from sin to holiness. This change must be, like that introduced by the fall, one which reaches to the very roots of our beings, affecting the entire man — removing the darkness of our minds, awakening and then pacifying the conscience, spiritualizing our affections, converting the will, reforming our whole life. And this great change must take place here on earth. The removal of the soul to heaven is no substitute for regeneration. It is not the place which conveys likeness to God. When the angels fell, they were in heaven, but the glory of God’s dwelling place did not restore them. Satan entered heaven (Job 2:1), but he left it still unchanged. There must be a likeness to God wrought in the soul by the Spirit before it is fitted to enjoy heaven.

“Flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God” (1Co 15:50). If the body must be changed ere it can enter heaven, how much more so the soul, for “there shall in no wise enter into it any thing that defileth” (Rev 21:27). And what is the supreme glory of heaven? Is it freedom from toil and worry, sickness and sorrow, suffering and death? No. Heaven is the place where there is the full manifestation of Him who is “glorious in ho-

liness”—that holiness which the wicked, while presumptuously hoping to go to heaven, despise and hate here on earth. The inhabitants of heaven are given a clear sight of the ineffable purity of God and are granted the most intimate communion with Him. But none are fitted for this unless their inner being (as well as outer lives) have undergone a radical, revolutionizing, supernatural change.

Can it be thought that Christ will prepare mansions of glory for those who refuse to receive Him into their hearts and give Him the first place in their lives down here? No, indeed; rather will He laugh at their calamity and mock when their fear cometh (Pro 1:26). The instrument of the heart must be tuned here on earth to fit it to produce the melody of praise in heaven. God has so linked together holiness and happiness (as He has sin and wretchedness) that they cannot be separated. Were it possible for an unregenerate soul to enter heaven, it would find there no sanctuary from the lashings of conscience and the tormenting fire of God’s holiness. Many suppose that nothing but the merits of Christ are needed to qualify them for heaven. But this is a great mistake. None receive remission of sins through the blood of Christ, who are not first “turned from the power of Satan unto God” (Act 26:18). God subdues their iniquities whose sin He casts into the depths of the sea (Mic 7:19). Pardoning sins and purifying the heart are as inseparable as the blood and water which flowed from the Saviour’s side (Joh 19:34).

Our being renewed in the spirit of our mind and our putting on of the new man “which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness” (Eph 4:2-24), is as indispensable to a meetness for heaven, as an having the righteousness of Christ imputed to us is for a title thereto. “A malefactor, by pardon, is in a capacity to come into the presence of a prince and serve him at his table, but he is not in the fitness till his noisome garments, full of vermin be taken off” (S. Charnock). It is both a fatal delusion and wicked presumption for one who is living to please self, to imagine that his sins have been forgiven by God. It is “the washing of regeneration” which gives evidence of our being justified by grace (Ti 3:5-7). When Christ saves, He indwells (Gal 2:20), and it is impossible for Him to reside in a heart which yet remains spiritually cold, hard, and lifeless. The supreme pattern of holiness cannot be a Patron of licentiousness.

Justification and sanctification are inseparable: where one is absolved from the guilt of sin, he is also delivered from the dominion of sin, but neither the one nor the other can be until the soul is regenerated. Just as Christ’s being made in the likeness of sin’s flesh was indispensable for God to impute to Him His people’s sins (Rom 8:3), so it is equally necessary for us to be made new creatures in Christ (2Co 5:17) before we can be, legally, made the righteousness of God in Him (2Co 5:21). The need of our being made “partakers of the divine nature” (2Pe 1:4) is as real and as great as Christ’s taking part in human nature, ere He could save us (Heb 2:14-17).

Except God be born, He cannot come into the kingdom of sin. Except a man be born again he cannot see the kingdom of righteousness. And divine power—the power of the Holy Spirit, the plenipotentiary and executant of all the will of Godhead—achieves the

incarnation of God and the regeneration of man, that the Son of God may be made sin, and the sons of God made righteous" (H. Martin).

How could one possibly enter a world of ineffable holiness who has spent all his time in sin, i.e., pleasing self? How could he possibly sing the song of the Lamb if his heart has never been tuned unto it? How could he endure to behold the awful majesty of God face to face who never before so much as saw Him "through a glass darkly" by the eye of faith? And as it is excruciating torture for the eyes that have been long confined to dismal darkness, to suddenly gaze upon the bright beams of the midday sun, so it will be when the unregenerate behold Him who is Light. Instead of welcoming such a sight "all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of Him" (Rev 1:7); yea, so overwhelming will be their anguish, they will call to the mountains and rocks, "Fall on us, and hide us from the face of Him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb" (Rev 6:16). And, my reader, that will be your experience, unless God regenerates you!

When the Lord Jesus said "That which is born of the flesh is flesh" (Joh 3:6) He not only intimated that every man born into this world inherits a corrupt and fallen nature, and therefore is unfit for the kingdom of God, but also that this corrupt nature can never be anything else but corrupt, so that no culture can fit it for the kingdom of God. Its tendencies may be restricted, its manifestations modified by education and circumstances, but its sinful tendencies and affections are still there. A corrupt tree cannot bring forth good fruit, prune and trim it as you may. For good fruit, you must have a good tree or graft from one. Therefore did our Lord go on to say, "And that which is born of the Spirit is spirit." This brings us to consider.

2. Its Nature

We have now arrived at the most difficult part of our subject. Necessarily so, for we are about to contemplate the workings of God. These are ever mysterious, and nothing whatever can be really known about them, save what He Himself has revealed thereon in His Word. In endeavoring to ponder what He has said on His work of regeneration, two dangers need to be guarded against: first, limiting our thoughts to any isolated statement thereon or any single figure the Spirit has employed to describe it. Second, reasoning from what He has said by carnalizing the figures He has employed. When referring to spiritual things, God has used terms which were originally intended (by man) to express material objects, hence we need to be constantly on our guard against transferring to the former erroneous ideas carried over from the latter. From this we shall be preserved if we diligently compare all that has been said on each subject.

In treating of the nature of regeneration, much damage has been wrought, especially in recent years, by men confining their attention to a single figure, namely, that of the "new birth," which is only one out of many expressions used in the Scriptures to denote that mighty and miraculous work of God within His people which fits them for communion with Him. Thus, in Colossians 1:12-13 the same vital experience is spoken of as God's having "made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light: who

hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of His dear Son.” Regeneration is the commencement of a new experience, which is so real and revolutionizing that the one who is the subject of this divine begetting is spoken of as a “new creature, old things are passed away, behold, all things are become new” (2Co 5:17). A new spiritual life has been imparted to the soul by God, so that the one receiving it is vitally implanted into Christ.

The nature of regeneration can, perhaps, be best perceived by comparing and contrasting it with what took place at the fall, for though the person who is renewed by the Spirit receives more than what Adam lost by his rebellion, yet, the one is, really, God’s answer to the former. Now it is most important that we should clearly recognize that no faculty was lost by man when he fell. When man was created, God gave unto him a spirit, soul and body. Thus, man was a tri-partite being. When man fell, the divine threat “In the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die” was duly executed, and man died spiritually. But that does not mean that either his spirit or soul or any part thereof, ceased to be, for in Scripture “death” never signifies annihilation, but is a state of separation. The prodigal son was “dead” while he was in the far country (Luk 15:24), because he was separated from his father. “Alienated from the life of God” (Eph 4:18) describes the fearful state of one who is unregenerated, so does “she that liveth in pleasure is dead while she liveth” (1Ti 5:6): that is, dead spiritually, dead Godwards, while alive in sin—the spirit, and soul and body, each being active against God.

That which took place at the fall was not the destruction of either portion of man’s three-fold being, but the vitiating or corrupting of them. And that, by the introduction of a new principle within him, namely, sin, which is more of a quality than a substance. But let it be stated very emphatically that a “nature” is not a concrete entity, but rather that which characterizes and impels an entity or creature. It is the nature of gravitation to attract, it is the nature of the wind to blow, it is the nature of fire to burn. A “nature” is not a tangible thing, but a principle of operation, a power impelling to action. Thus, when we say that fallen man possesses a “sinful nature,” it must not be understood that something as substantial as his soul or spirit was added to his being, but instead, that the principle of evil entered into him, which polluted and defiled every part of his constitution, as frost entering fruit spoils it.

At the fall, man lost none of the faculties with which the Creator had originally endowed him, but he lost the power to use his faculties Godwards. All desire Godwards, all love for his Maker, all real knowledge of Him, was lost. Sin possessed him: sin as a principle of evil, as a power of operation, as a defiling influence, took complete charge of his spirit and soul and body, so that he became the “servant” or slave “of sin” (Joh 8:34). As such, man is no more capable of producing that which is good, spiritual, and acceptable to God, than frost can burn or fire freeze: “they that are in the flesh [remain in their natural and fallen condition] cannot please God” (Rom 8:8). They have no power to do so, for all their faculties, every part of their being, is completely under the dominion of sin. So completely is fallen man beneath the power of sin and spiritual death, that the

things of the Spirit of God are “foolishness” unto him, “neither can he know them” (1Co 2:14).

Now that which takes place at regeneration is the reversing of what happened at the fall. The one born again is, through Christ, and by the Spirit’s operation, restored to union and communion with God; the one who before was spiritually dead, is now spiritually alive: John 5:24. Just as spiritual death was brought about by the entrance into man’s being of the principle of evil, so spiritual life is the introduction of a principle of holiness. God communicates a new principle, as real and as potent as sin. Divine grace is now imparted. A holy disposition is wrought in the soul. A new temper of spirit is bestowed upon the inner man. But no new faculties are created within him, rather are his original faculties enriched, ennobled, and empowered. Just as man did not become less than a threefold being when he fell, so he does not become more than a threefold being when he is renewed. Nor will he in heaven itself: his spirit and soul and body will simply be glorified, i.e., completely delivered from every taint of sin, and perfectly conformed to the image of God’s Son.

At regeneration a new nature is imparted by God. But again we need to be closely on our guard lest we carnalize our conception of what is denoted by that expression. Much confusion has been caused through failure to recognize that it is a person, and not merely a “nature” which is born of the Spirit: “ye must be born again” (Joh 3:7), not merely something in you must be: “he is born of God” (1Jo 3:9). The same person who was spiritually dead—his whole being alienated from God—is now made spiritually alive: his whole being reconciled to God. This must be so, or otherwise there would be no preservation of the identity of the individual. It is the person, and not simply a nature which is born of God: “Of his own will begat he us” (Jam 1:18). It is a new birth of the individual himself, and not of something in him. The nature is never changed, but the person is—relatively, not absolutely.

The person of the regenerate man is essentially the same as the person of the unregenerate: each having a spirit, and soul and body. But just as in fallen man there is also a principle of evil which has corrupted every part of his threefold being, which “principle” is his “sinful nature” (so-called because it expresses his evil disposition and character as it is the “nature” of swine to be filthy), so when a person is born again another and new “principle” is introduced into this being, a new “nature” or disposition, a disposition which propels him Godwards. Thus, in both cases, “nature” is a quality rather than a substance. “That which is born of the Spirit is spirit” must not be conceived of as something substantial, distinct from the soul of the regenerate, like one portion of matter added to another; rather is it that which spiritualizes all his inward faculties, as the “flesh” had carnalized them.

Again; “that which is born of the Spirit is spirit” is to be carefully distinguished from that “spirit” which every man has in addition to his soul and body: (see Num 16:22; Ecc 12:7; Zec 12:1). That which is born of the Spirit is not something tangible, but that which is spiritual and holy, and that is a quality rather than a substance. In proof of this

compare the usage of the word “spirit” in these passages: in James 4:5 the inclination and disposition to envy is called “the spirit that dwelleth in us lusteth to envy.” In Luke 9:55 Christ said to His disciples, “ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of,” thereby signifying, ye are ignorant of what a fiery disposition is in your hearts. (See also Num 5:14; Hos 4:12; 2Ti 1:7.) That which is born of the Spirit is a principle of spiritual life, which renovates all the faculties of the soul.

Some help upon this mysterious part of our subject is to be obtained by noting that in such passages as John 3:6, etc., “spirit” is contrasted from the “flesh.” Now it should scarcely need saying that “the flesh” is not a concrete entity, being quite distinct from the body. When the term “flesh” is used in a moral sense, the reference is always to the corruption of fallen man’s nature. In Galatians 5:19-21 the “works of the flesh” are described, among them being “hatred” and “envying,” in connection with which the body (as distinguished from the mind) is not implicated—clear proof that the “flesh” and the “body” are not synonymous terms. In Galatians 5 the “flesh” is used to designate those evil tendencies and affections which result in the sins there mentioned. Thus, the “flesh” refers to the degenerate state of man’s spirit and soul and body, as the “spirit” refers to the regenerate state of the spirit and soul—the regeneration of the body being yet future.

The privative (darkness is the privative of light) or negative side of regeneration, is that divine grace gives a mortal wound to indwelling sin. Sin is not then eradicated nor totally slain in the believer, but it is divested of its reigning power over his faculties. The Christian is no longer the helpless slave of sin, for he resists it, fights against it, and to speak of a helpless victim “fighting,” is a contradiction in terms. At the new birth sin receives its death-blow, though its dying struggles within us are yet powerful and acutely felt. Proof of what we have said is found in the fact that while sin’s solicitations were once agreeable to us, they are now hated. This aspect of regeneration is presented in Scripture under a variety of figures, such as the taking away of the heart of stone (Eze 36:26), the binding of the strong man (Mat 12:29), etc. The absolute dominion of sin over us is destroyed by God (Rom 6:14).

The positive side of regeneration is that divine grace effects a complete change in the state of the soul, by infusing a principle of spiritual life, which renovates all its faculties. It is this which constitutes its subject a “new creature,” not in respect of his essence, but of his views, his desires, his aspirations, his habits. Regeneration or the new birth is the divine communication of a powerful and revolutionizing principle in the soul and spirit, under the influence of which all their native faculties are exercised in a different manner from that in which they were formerly employed, and in this sense “old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new” (2Co 5:17). His thoughts are “new,” the objects of his choice are “new,” his aims and motives are “new,” and thereby the whole of his external deportment is changed.

“By the grace of God I am what I am” (1Co 15:10). The reference here is to subjective grace. There is an objective grace, inherent in God, which is His love, favour, goodwill

for His elect. There is also a subjective grace which terminates on them, whereby a change is wrought in them. This is by the infusion of a principle of spiritual life, which is the spring of the Christian's actions. This "principle" is called "a new heart" and a "new spirit" (Eze 36:26). It is a supernatural habit, residing in every faculty and power of the soul, as a principle of holy and spiritual operation. Some have spoken of this supernatural experience as a "change of heart." If by this expression be meant that there is a change wrought in the fallen nature itself, as though that which is natural is transformed into that which is spiritual, as though that which was born of the flesh ceased to be "flesh," and became that which is born of the Spirit, then, the term is to be rejected. But if by this expression be meant, an acknowledgement of the reality of the divine work, which is wrought in those whom God regenerates, it is quite permissible.

When treating of regeneration under the figure of the new birth, some writers have introduced analogies from natural birth which Scripture by no means warrants, in fact disallows. Physical birth is the bringing forth into this world of a creature, a complete personality, which before conception had no existence whatsoever. But the one who is regenerated had a complete personality before he was born again. To this statement it may be objected, not a spiritual personality! What is meant by this? Spirit and matter are opposites, and we only create confusion if we speak or think of that which is spiritual as being something concrete. Regeneration is not the creating of a person which hitherto had no existence, but the renewing and restoring of a person whom sin had unfitted for communion with God and this by the communication of a nature or principle of life, which gives a new and different bias to all his old faculties. It is altogether an erroneous view to regard a Christian as made up of two distinct personalities.

As "justification" describes the change in the Christian's objective relationship to God, so "regeneration" denotes that intrinsic subjective change which is wrought in the inclinations and tendencies of their souls Godwards. This saving work of God within His people is likened unto a "birth" because it is the gateway into a new world, the beginning of an entirely new experience, and also because as the natural birth is an issuing from a place of darkness and confinement (the womb) into a state of light and liberty, so is the experience of the soul when the Spirit quickens us. But the very fact that this revolutionizing experience is also likened unto a resurrection (1Jo 3:14) should deliver us from forming a one-sided conception of what is meant by the "new birth" and the "new creature," for resurrection is not the absolute creation of a new body, but the restoration and glorification of the old body. Regeneration is also called a divine "begetting" (1Pe 1:3), because the image or likeness of the Begetter is conveyed and stamped upon the soul. As the first Adam begat a son in his own image and likeness (Gen 5:3), so the last Adam has an "image" (Rom 8:29) to convey to His sons: (Eph 4:24; Col 3:10).

It has often been said that in the Christian there are two distinct and diverse "natures," namely, the "flesh" and the "spirit" (Gal 5:17). This is true, yet care must be taken to avoid regarding these two "natures" as anything more than two "principles" of action. Thus in Romans 7:23 the two "natures" or "principles" in the Christian are spoken of as

“I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind.” The flesh and the spirit in the believer must be conceived of as something very different from the “two natures” in the blessed person of our Redeemer, the God-man. Both the Deity and humanity were substantial entities in Him. Moreover, the “two natures” in the saint result in a necessary conflict (Gal 5:17), whereas in Christ there was not only complete harmony, but one Lord.

The faculties of the Christian’s soul remain the same in their essence, substance, and natural powers, as before he was “renewed,” but these faculties are changed in their properties, qualities and inclinations. It may help us to obtain a clearer conception of this if we illustrate by a reference to the waters at Marah (Exo 15:25-26). Those “waters” were the same waters still, both before and after their cure. Of themselves in their own nature, they were “bitter,” so as the people could not drink of them; but in the casting of a tree into them, they were made sweet and useful. So too with the waters at Jericho (2Ki 2:20-21), which were cured by the casting of salt (emblem of grace, Col 4:6) into them. In like manner the Christian’s affections continue the same as they were in their nature and essence, but they are cured or healed by grace, so that their properties, qualities, and inclinations, are “renewed” (Tit 3:5), the love of God now being shed abroad in the heart by the Holy Spirit (Rom 5:5).

What man lost by the fall was his original relation to God, which kept all his faculties and affections within proper exercise of that relation. At regeneration the Christian received a new life, which gave a new direction to his faculties, presenting new objects before them. Yet, let it be said emphatically, it is not merely the restoration of the life which Adam lost, but one of unspeakably higher relations: he received the life which the Son of God has in Himself, even “eternal life.” But the old personality still remains. This is clear from Romans 6:13, “but yield yourselves unto God, as those that are alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness unto God.” The members of the same individual are now to serve a new Master.

Regeneration is that which alone fits a fallen creature to fulfill his one great and chief duty, namely, to glorify his Maker. This is to be the aim and the end in view in all that we do: “Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God” (1Co 10:31). It is the motive actuating us and the purpose before us which gives value to each action: “When thine eye [figure of the soul looking outward] is single [having only one object in view—the glory of God], thy whole body also is full of light; but when thine eye is evil, thy body also is full of darkness” (Luk 11:34). If the intention be evil, as it certainly is when the glory of God is not before us, there is nothing but “darkness,” sin, in the whole service.

Now fallen man has altogether departed from what ought to be his chief end, aim, or object, for instead of having before him the honour of God, himself is his chief concern; and instead of seeking to please God in all things, he lives only to please himself or his fellow-creatures. Even when, through religious training, the claims of God have been brought to his notice and pressed upon his attention, at best he only parcels out one part

of his time, strength, and substance to the One who gave him being and daily loadeth him with benefits, and another part for himself and the world. The natural man is utterly incapable of giving supreme respect unto God, until he becomes the recipient of a spiritual life. None will truly aim at the glory of God until they have an affection for Him. None will honour Him supremely whom they do not supremely love. And for this, the love of God must be shed abroad in the heart by the Holy Spirit (Rom 5:5), and this only takes place at regeneration. Then it is, and not till then, that self is dethroned and God enthroned; then it is that the renewed creature is enabled to comply with God's imperative call, "My son, give me thine heart" (Pro 23:26).

The salient elements which comprise the nature of regeneration may, perhaps, be summed up in these three words: impartation, renovation, subjugation. God communicates something to the one who is born again, namely, a principle of faith and obedience, a holy nature, eternal life. This though real, palpable, and potent, is nothing material or tangible, nothing added to our essence, substance or person. Again, God renews every faculty of the soul and spirit of the one born again, not perfectly and finally, for we are "renewed day by day" (2Co 4:16), but so as to enable those faculties to be exercised upon spiritual objects. Again, God subdues the power of sin indwelling the one born again. He does not eradicate it, but He dethrones it, so that it no longer has dominion over the heart. Instead of sin ruling the Christian, and that by his own willing subjection, it is resisted and hated.

Regeneration is not the improvement or purification of the "flesh," which is that principle of evil still with the believer. The appetites and tendencies of the "flesh" are precisely the same after the new birth as they were before, only they no longer reign over him. For a time it may seem that the "flesh" is dead, yet in reality it is not so. Often its very stillness (as an army in ambush) is only awaiting its opportunity or a gathering up of its strength for a further attack. It is not long ere the renewed soul discovers that the "flesh" is yet very much alive, desiring to have its way. But grace will not suffer it to have its sway. On the one hand the Christian has to say, "For to will is present with me, but how to perform that which is good I find not" (Rom 7:18). On the other hand, he is able to declare, "Christ liveth in me, and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me" (Gal 2:20).

Some people find it very difficult to conceive of the same person bringing forth good works who before brought forth nothing but evil works, the more so when it be insisted upon that no new faculty is added to his being, that nothing substantial is either imparted or taken from his person. But if we rightly introduce the factor of God's mighty power into the equation, then the difficulty disappears. We may not be able to explain (in fact we are not) how God's power acts upon us, how He cleanses the unclean (Act 10:15) and subdues the wolf so that it dwells with the lamb (Isa 11:6), any more than we can thoroughly understand His working upon and within us without destroying our own personal agency; nevertheless, both Scripture and experience testify to each of these facts. It

may help us a little at this point if we contemplate the working of God's power in the natural realm.

In the natural realm every creature is not only entirely dependent upon its Maker for its continued existence, but also for the exercise of all its faculties, for "in Him we live, and move [Greek, 'are moved'], and have our being" (Act 17:28). Again; as the various parts of creation are linked together, and afford each other mutual support—as the heavens fertilize the earth, the earth supplies its inhabitants with food, its inhabitants propagate their kind, rear their offspring, and co-operate for the purpose of society—so also the whole system is supported, sustained and governed by the directing providence of God. The influences of providence, the manner in which they operate on the creature, are profoundly mysterious: on the one hand, they are not destructive of our rational nature, reducing us to mere irresponsible automatons: on the other hand they are all made completely subservient to the divine purpose.

Now the operation of God's power in regeneration is to be regarded as of the same kind with its operation in providence, although it be exercised with a different design. God's energy is one, though it is distinguished by the objects on which, and the ends for which, it is exerted. It is the same power that creates as upholds in existence: the same power that forms a stone, and a sunbeam: the same power that gives vegetable life to a tree, animal life to a brute, and rational life to a man. In like manner, it is the same power that assists us in the natural exercise of our faculties, as it is which enables us to exercise those faculties in a spiritual manner. Hence "grace" as a principle of divine operation in the spiritual realm, is the same power of God as "nature" is, His process of operation in the natural world.

The grace of God in the application of redemption to the hearts of His people is indeed mighty, as is evident from the effects produced. It is a change of the whole man: of his views, motives, inclinations and pursuits. Such a change no human means are able to accomplish. When the thoughtless are made to think, and to think with a seriousness and intensity which they never formerly did; when the careless are, in a moment, affected with a deep sense of their most important interests; when lips which are accustomed to blaspheme, learn to pray; when the proud are brought to assume the lowly attitude and language of the penitent; when those who were devoted to the world give evidence that the object of their desires and aims is a heavenly inheritance; and when this revolution, so wonderful, has been effected by the simple Word of God, and by the very Word which the subject of this radical change had often heard unmoved, it is proof positive that a mighty influence has been exerted, and that influence is nothing less than divine—God's people have been made willing in the day of His power (Psa 110:3).

Many figures are used in Scripture, various expressions are employed by the Spirit, to describe the saving work of God within His people. In 2 Peter 1:4 the regenerated are said to be "partakers of the divine nature," which does not mean of the very essence or being of God, for that can neither be divided nor communicated—in heaven itself there will still be an unmeasurable distance between the Creator and the creature, otherwise

the finite would become infinite, No, to be “partakers of the divine nature” is to be made the recipients of inherent grace, to have the lineaments of the divine image stamped upon the soul: as the remainder of that verse shows. Being “partakers of the divine nature” is the antithesis of “the corruption that is in the world through lust.”

In 2 Corinthians 3:18, this transforming miracle of God’s grace in His people is declared to be a “changing” into the image of Christ. The Greek word there for “change” is the one rendered “transfigured” in Matthew 17:2. At Christ’s transfiguration no new features were added to the Saviour’s face, but His whole countenance was irradiated by a new light; so in 2 Corinthians 4:6 regeneration is likened unto a “light” which God commands to shine in us—note the whole context of 2 Corinthians 3:18 is treating of the Spirit’s work by the Gospel. In Ephesians 2:10, this product of God’s grace is spoken of as His “workmanship,” and is said to be “created,” to show that He, and not man, is the Author of it. In Galatians 4:19, this same work of God in the soul is termed Christ’s being “formed” in us—as the parents’ seed is formed or molded in the mother’s womb, the “likeness” of the parent being stamped upon it.

We cannot here attempt a full list of the numerous figures and expressions which the Holy Spirit has employed to set forth this saving work of God in the soul. In John 6:44 it is spoken of as a being “drawn” to Christ. In Acts 16:14 as the heart being “opened” by the Lord to receive His Truth. In Acts 26:18 as the opening of our eyes, a turning us from darkness unto light, and the power of Satan unto God. In 2 Corinthians 10:5 as the “casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ.” In Ephesians 5:8 as being “light in the Lord.” In 2 Thessalonians 2:13 it is designated the “sanctification of the Spirit.” In Hebrews 8:10 as God’s putting His laws into our mind and writing them on our heart—contrast the figure in Jeremiah 17:1! Thus it should be most apparent that we lose much by limiting our attention to one figure of it. All we have given, and still others not mentioned, need to be taken into consideration, if we are to obtain anything approaching an adequate conception of the nature of that miracle of grace which is wrought in the soul and spirit of the elect, enabling them to henceforth live unto God.

As man was changed in Adam from what he was by a state of creation, so man must be changed in Christ from what he is by a state of corruption. This change which fits him for communion with God, is a divine work wrought in the inclinations of the soul. It is a being renewed in the spirit of our minds (Eph 4:23). It is the infusion of a principle of holiness into all the faculties of our inner being. It is the spiritual renovation of our very persons, which will yet be consummated by the regeneration of our bodies. The whole soul is renewed, according to the image of God in knowledge, holiness and righteousness. A new light shines into the mind, a new power moves the will, a new object attracts the affections. The individual is the same, and yet not the same. How different the landscape when the sun is shining, than when the darkness of a moonless night is upon it—the same landscape, and yet not the same. How different the condition of him

who is restored to health and vigor after having been brought very low by sickness; yet it is the same person.

The very fact that the Holy Spirit has employed the figures of “begetting” and “birth” to the saving work of God in the soul, intimates that the reference is only to the initial experience of divine grace: “He which hath begun a good work in you” (Phi 1:6). As an infant has all the parts of a man, yet none of them have come to maturity; so regeneration gives a perfection of parts, which yet have need to be developed. A new life has been received, but there needs to be growth of it: “grow in grace” (2Pe 3:18). As God was the Giver of this life, He only can feed and strengthen it. Thus, Titus 3:5 speaks of “the renewing” and not the “renewal” of the Holy Spirit. But it is our responsibility and bounden duty to use the divinely-appointed means of grace which promote spiritual growth: “Desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby” (1Pe 2:2); as it is our obligation to constantly avoid everything which would hinder our spiritual prosperity: “Make not provision for the flesh, to fulfill the lusts thereof” (Rom 13:14; cf Mat 5:29-30; 2Co 7:1).

God’s consummating of the initial work which we experience at the new birth, and which He renews throughout the course of our earthly lives, only takes place at the second coming of our Saviour, when we shall be perfectly and eternally conformed to His image, both inwardly and outwardly. First, regeneration; then our gradual sanctification; finally our glorification. But between the new birth and glorification, while we are left down here, the Christian has both the “flesh” and the “spirit,” both a principle of sin and a principle of holiness, operating within him, the one opposing the other (see Gal 5:16-17). Hence his inward experience is such as that which is described in Romans 7:7-25. As life is opposed to death, purity to impurity, spirituality to carnality, so is now felt and experienced within the soul a severe conflict between sin and grace. This conflict is perpetual, as the “flesh” and “spirit” strive for mastery. From hence proceeds the absolute necessity of the Christian being sober, and to “watch unto prayer.”

Finally, let it be pointed out that the principle of life and obedience (the “new nature”) which is received at regeneration, is not able to preserve the soul from sins, nevertheless, there is full provision for continual supplies of grace made for it and all its wants in the Lord Jesus Christ. There are treasures of relief in Him, whereunto the soul may at any time repair and find necessary succor against every incursion of sin. This new principle of holiness may say to the believer’s soul, as David did unto Abiathar when he fled from Doeg: “Abide thou with me, fear not: for he that seeketh my life seeketh thy life: but with me thou shalt be in safeguard” (1Sa 22:23). Sin is the enemy of the new nature as truly as it is of the Christian’s soul, and his only safety lies in heeding the requests of that new nature, and calling upon Christ for enablement. Thus we are exhorted in Hebrews 4:16, “Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.”

If it ever be a time of need with the soul, it is so when it is under the assaults of provoking sins, when the “flesh” is lusting against the “spirit.” But at that very time there is

suitable and seasonable help in Christ for succor and relief. The new nature begs, with sighs and groans, for the believer to apply to Christ. To neglect Him, with all His provision of grace, whilst He stands calling on us, “Open to me...for my head is filled with dew, and my locks with the drops of the night” (Song 5:2), is to despise the sighing of the poor prisoner, the new nature, which sin is seeking to destroy, and cannot but be a high provocation against the Lord.

At the beginning, God entrusted Adam and Eve with a stock of grace in themselves, but they cast it away, and themselves into the utmost misery thereby. That His children might not perish a second time, God, instead of imparting to them personally the power to overcome sin and Satan, has laid up their portion in Another, a safe Treasurer; in Christ are their lives and comforts secured (Col 3:3). And how must Christ regard us, if instead of applying to Him for relief, we allow sin to distress our conscience, destroy our peace, and mar our communion? Such is not a sin of infirmity which cannot be avoided, but a grievous affront of Christ. The means of preservation from it is at hand. Christ is always accessible. He is ever ready to “succour them that are tempted” (Heb 2:18). O to betake ourselves to Him more and more, day by day, for everything. Then shall each one find “I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me” (Phi 4:13).

All men are by nature the children of wrath, and do belong unto the world, which is the kingdom of Satan (1Jo 5:19), and are under the power of darkness. In this state men are not the subjects of Christ’s kingdom, and have no meetness for heaven. From this terrible state they are unable to deliver themselves, being “without strength” (Rom 5:6). Out of this state God’s elect are supernaturally “called” (1Pe 2:9), which call effectually delivers them from the power of Satan and translates them into the kingdom of God’s dear Son (Col 1:13). This divine “call,” or work of grace, is variously denominated in Scripture: sometimes by “regeneration” (Ti 3:5), or the new birth, sometimes by illumination (2Co 4:6), by transformation (2Co 3:18), by spiritual resurrection (Joh 5:24). This inward and invincible call is attended with justification and adoption (Rom 8:30; Eph 1:5), and is carried on by sanctification in holiness. This leads us to consider:

3. Its Effects

“The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit” (Joh 3:8). Though the wind be imperious in its action, man being unable to regulate it; though it be mysterious in its nature, man knowing nothing of the cause which controls it; yet its presence is unmistakable, its effects are plainly evidenced: so it is with every one that is born of the Spirit. His secret but powerful operations lie beyond the reach of our understanding. Why God has ordained that the Spirit should quicken this person and not that, we know not, but the transforming results of His working are plain and palpable. What they are, we shall now endeavor to describe.

A. The illumination of the understanding

As it was in the old creation, so it is in connection with the new. "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth" (Gen 1:1). That was the original creation. then came degeneration: "And the earth was [Heb. became] without form, and void [a desolate waste]; and darkness was upon the face of the deep." Next came restoration: "And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters. And God said, Let there be light: and there was light." So it is when God begins to restore fallen man: "For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ" (2Co 4:6).

The divine illumination which the mind receives at the new birth is not by means of dreams or visions, nor does it consist in the revelation of things to the soul which have not been made known in the Scriptures. Not so, the only means or instrument which the Holy Spirit employs is the written Word: "The entrance of Thy words giveth light; it giveth understanding unto the simple" (Psa 119:130). Hitherto, God's Word may have been read attentively, and much of its teaching intellectually apprehended; but because there was a "veil" upon the heart (2Co 3:15) and so no spiritual discernment (1Co 2:14), the reader was not inwardly affected thereby. But now the Spirit removes the veil, opens the heart to receive the Word (Act 16:14), and powerfully applies to the mind and conscience some portion of it. The result is that, the one renewed is able to say "One thing I know, that, whereas I was blind, now I see" (Joh 9:25). To particularize:

The sinner is now enlightened in the knowledge of his own terrible condition. He may, before this, have received much scriptural instruction, subscribed to a sound creed, and believed intellectually in "the total depravity of man"; but now the solemn declarations of God's Word concerning the state of the fallen creature are brought home in piercing power to his own soul. No longer does he compare himself with his fellows, but measures himself by the rule of God. He now discovers that he is unclean, that his heart is "desperately wicked," and that he is altogether unfit for the presence of the thrice holy God. He is powerfully convicted of his own awful sins, feels that they are more in number than the hairs of his head, and that they are high provocations against heaven, which call for divine judgment on him. He now realizes that there is "no soundness" (Isa 1:6) in him, and that all his best performances are only as "filthy rags" (Isa 64:6), and that he is deserving of nought but the everlasting burnings.

By the spiritual light which God communicates in regeneration the soul now perceives the infinite demerits of sin, that its "wages" can be nothing less than eternal death, or the loss of divine favor and a dreadful suffering under the wrath of God. The equity of God's law and the fact that sin righteously calls for such punishment is humbly acknowledged. Thus his mouth is "stopped" and he confesses himself to be guilty before God, and justly liable to His awful vengeance, both for the plague of his own heart and his numerous transgressions. He now realizes that his whole life has been lived in utter independence of God, having had no respect for His glory, no concern whether he pleased or displeased Him. He now perceives the exceeding sinfulness of sin, its awful

malignity, as being in its nature contrary to the law of God. How to escape the due reward of his iniquity, he knows not. "What must I do to be saved?" is his agonizing cry. He is convinced of the absolute impossibility of contributing anything to his deliverance. He no longer has any confidence in the flesh; he has been brought to the end of himself.

By means of this illumination the renewed soul, under the guidance of the Spirit through the Word, now perceives how well-suited is Christ to such a poor, worthless wretch as he feels himself to be. The prospect of obtaining deliverance from the wrath to come through the victorious life and death of the Lord Jesus, keeps his soul from being overwhelmed with grief and from sinking into complete despondency because of the sight of his sins. As the Spirit presents to him the infinite merits of Christ's obedience and righteousness, His tender compassion for sinners, His power to save, desire for an interest in Christ, now possess his heart; and he is resolved to look for salvation in no other. Under the benign influences of the Holy Spirit, the soul is drawn by some such words as, "Come unto me all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest," or "him that cometh to me, I will in no wise cast out," and he is led to apply to Him for pardon, cleansing, peace, righteousness, and strength.

Other acts besides turning unto Christ flow from this new principle received at regeneration, such as repentance, which is a godly sorrow for sin, an abhorring of it as sin, and an earnest desire to forsake and be completely delivered from its pollution. In the light of God, the renewed soul now perceives the utter vanity of the world, and the worthlessness of these paltry toys and perishing trifles which the godless strive so hard to acquire. He has been awakened from the dream-sleep of death, and things are now seen in their true nature. Time is precious and not to be frittered away. God in His awesome Majesty is an object to be feared. His law is accepted as holy, just and good. All of these perceptions and actions are included in that holiness without which no man shall see the Lord. In some these actions are more vigorous than in others, and consequently, are more perceptible to a man's self. But the fruits of them are visible to others in external acts.

B. The elevation of the heart

Rightly does the Lord claim the first place: "He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me" (Mat 10:37). "My son, give me thine heart" (Pro 23:26) expresses God's claim: they "first gave their own selves to the Lord" (2Co 8:5) declares the response of the regenerate. But it is not until they are born again that any are spiritually capacitated to do this, for by nature men are "lovers of their own selves" and "lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God" (2Ti 3:2, 4). When a sinner is renewed, his affections are taken off his idols and fixed on the Lord (1Th 1:9). Hence it is written "with the heart [the affections] man believeth unto righteousness" (Rom 10:10). And hence, also, it is written, "If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be accursed" (1Co 16:22).

"And the LORD thy God will circumcise thine heart, and the heart of thy seed, to love the LORD thy God with all thine heart" (Deu 30:6). The "circumcising" of the heart is the "renewing" of it, severing its love from all illicit objects. None can truly love God su-

premely till this miracle of grace has been wrought within him. Then it is that the affections are refined and directed to their proper objects. He who once was despised by the soul, is now beheld as the “altogether lovely” One. He who was hated (Joh 15:18), is now loved above all others. “Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire beside thee” (Psa 73:25) is now their joyous confession.

The love of God has become the governing principle of the life (2Co 5:13). What before was drudgery is now a delight. The praise of man is no longer the motive which stimulates action; the approbation of the Saviour is the Christian’s highest concern. Gratitude moves a hearty compliance with His will. “How precious also are thy thoughts unto me, O God!” (Psa 139:17) is now his language. And again, “The desire of our soul is to thy name, and to the remembrance of thee. With my soul have I desired thee in the night; yea, with my spirit within me will I seek thee early” (Isa 26:8,9). So too the heart is drawn out to all the members of His family, no matter what their nationality, social position, or church-connection: “We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren (1Jo 3:14).

C. The emancipation of the will

By nature, the will of fallen man is free in only one direction: away from God. Sin has enslaved the will, therefore do we need to be “made free” (Joh 8:36). The two states are contrasted in Romans 6: “free from righteousness” when dead in sin (v20); “free from sin” now that we are alive unto God (v18). At the new birth the will is liberated from the “bondage of corruption” (Rom 8:21 and cf 2Pe 2:19) and rendered conformable to the will of God (Psa 119:97). In our degenerate state the will was naturally rebellious, and its practical language was, “Who is the LORD, that I should obey his voice?” (Exo 5:2). But the Father promised the Son, “Thy people shall be willing in the day of thy power” (Psa 110:3), and this is accomplished when God “worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure” (Phi 2:13 and cf Heb 13:21).

“A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them” (Eze 36:26-27). This is a new-covenant promise (Heb 8:10), and is made good in each renewed soul. The will is so emancipated from the power of indwelling sin as to be enabled to answer to the divine commands according to the tenor of the new covenant. The regenerated freely consent to and gladly choose to walk in subjection to Christ, being anxious now to obey Him in all things. His authority is their only rule, His love the constraining power: “If a man love me, he will keep my words” (Joh 14:23).

D. The rectification of the conduct

A tree is known by its fruits. Faith is evidenced by works. The principle of holiness manifests itself in a godly walk. “If ye know that he is righteous, ye know that every one that doeth righteousness is born of him” (1Jo 2:29). The deepest longing of every child of

God is to please his heavenly Father in all things, and though this longing is never fully realized in this life—"not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect" (Phi 3:12)—nevertheless he continues "reaching forth unto those things which are before."

"Ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine whereto ye were delivered" (Rom 6:17 mar.). The Greek word for "form" here signifies "mold." Observe how this figure also presupposes the same faculties after the new birth as before. Metal which is molded remains the same metal it was previously, only the fashion or form of it is altered. That metal which before was a dish, is now turned into a cup, and thus a new name is given to it: cf Revelation 3:12. By regeneration the faculties of the soul are made suitable to God and His precepts, just as the mold and the thing molded fit one another. As before the heart was at enmity against every commandment, it is now molded to them. Does God say, "Fear Me," the renewed heart answers, "I desire to fear thy name" (Neh 1:11). Does God say, "Remember the sabbath day to keep it holy," the heart answers, "The sabbath is my delight" (Isa 58:13). Does God say, "Love one another," the new creature finds an instinct begotten within him to do so, so that real Christians are said to be "taught of God to love one another" (1Th 4:9).

A change will take place in the deportment of the most moral unconverted man as soon as he is born from above. Not only will he be far less eager in his pursuit of the world, more scrupulous in the selection of his company, more cautious in avoiding the occasions to sin and the appearance of evil, but he realizes that the holy eye of God is ever upon him, marking not only his actions, but weighing his motives. He now bears the sacred name of Christ, and his deepest concern is to be kept from everything which would bring reproach upon it. His aim is to let his light so shine before men that they may see his good works and glorify his Father which is in heaven. That which occasions him the deepest distress is not the sneers and taunts of the ungodly, but that he fails to measure up to the standard God has set before him and the conformity to it after which he so much yearns. Though divine grace may preserve him from outward falls, yet he is painfully conscious of many sins within: the rising of unbelief, the swellings of pride, the opposition of the "flesh" to the desires of the "spirit." These occasion him deep exercises of heart and lead to humble and sorrowful confessions unto God.

It is of great importance that the Christian should have clear and scriptural views of what he is both as the subject of sin and of grace. Though the regenerate are delivered from the absolute dominion of sin (Rom 6:14), yet the principle of sin, the "flesh," is not eradicated. This is clear from Romans 6:12, "Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, that ye should obey it in the lusts thereof:" that exhortation would be meaningless if there were no indwelling sin seeking to reign, and no lusts demanding obedience. Yet this is far from saying that a Christian must go on in a course of sinning; "Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin; for his seed remaineth in him: and he cannot sin, because he is born of God" (1Jo 3:9), the reference there being to the regular practice and

habit of sinning. Nevertheless, prayerful heed needs to be constantly paid to this word, "Awake to righteousness, and sin not" (1Co 15:34).

The experiences of Paul, both as a subject of sin and of grace, are recorded in Romans 7. A careful reading of verses 14-24 reveals the fact that grace had neither removed nor purified the "flesh" in him. And as the Christian today compares his own inner conflicts, he finds that Romans 7 describes them most accurately and faithfully. He discovers that in his "flesh" is no good thing and he cries "O wretched man that I am." Though he longs for fuller conformity to the image of Christ, though he hungers and thirsts after righteousness, though he is under the influence and reign of grace, and though he enjoys real fellowship with God, yet, at seasons (some more acutely felt than others) he feels that though with the mind he serves the law of God, yet with the flesh the law of sin. Yea, every experience of reading the Word, prayer, meditation, proves to him that he is, in his fallen nature, "carnal, sold under sin," and that when he would do good, evil is present with him. This is a matter of great grief to him, and causes him to "groan" (Rom 8:23) and yearn the more for release from this body of death.

But ought not the Christian to "grow in grace?" Yes, indeed. Yet let it be said emphatically that growing "in grace" most certainly does not mean an increasing satisfaction with myself. No, it is the very opposite. The more I walk in the light of God, the more plainly can I see "flesh" within me, and there will be an ever-deepening abhorrence of what I am by nature. "For to will is present with me, but how to perform that which is good I find not" (Rom 7:18) is not the confession of an unbeliever, nor even of a babe in Christ, but of the most enlightened saint. The only relief from this distressing discovery and the only peace for the renewed heart is to look away from self to Christ and His perfect work for us. Faith empties of all self-complacency and gives an exalted estimate of God in Christ.

A growth "in grace" is defined, in part by the words that immediately follow: "and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ" (2Pe 3:18). It is the growing realization of the perfect suitability of Christ to a poor sinner, the deepening conviction of his fitness to be the Saviour of such a vile wretch as the Spirit daily shows me I am. It is the apprehension of how much I need His precious blood to cleanse me, His righteousness to clothe me, His arm to support me, His advocacy to answer for me on High, His grace to deliver me from all my enemies both inward and outward. It is the Spirit revealing to me that there is in Christ everything that I need both for earth and heaven, time and eternity. Thus, growing in grace is an increasing living outside of myself, living upon Christ. It is a looking to Him for the supply of every need.

The more the heart is occupied with Christ, the more the mind is stayed upon Him by trusting in Him (Isa 26:3), the more will faith, hope, love, patience, meekness, and all spiritual graces be strengthened and drawn forth into exercise and act to the glory of God. The manifestation of growth in grace and in the knowledge of Christ is another thing. The actual process of growing is not perceptible either in the natural or in the spiritual sphere; but the results of it are—mainly so to others. There are definite seasons

of growth, and generally the Christian's spiritual graces are growing the most while the soul is in distress through manifold temptations, mourning on account of indwelling sin. It is when we are enjoying God and are in conscious communion with Him, feasting upon the perfections of Christ, that the fruits of the Spirit in us are ripened. The chief evidences of spiritual growth in the Christian are a deepening hatred of sin and loathing of self, a higher valuation of spiritual things, and yearning after them, a fuller recognition of our deep need and dependency on God to supply it.

Regeneration is substantially the same in all who are the subjects of it: there is a spiritual transformation, the conforming of the soul unto the image of God: "that which is born of the Spirit is spirit (John 3:6). But although every regenerated person is a new creature, has received a principle of faith and holiness which acts on every faculty of his being, and is indwelt and led by the Holy Spirit, yet God does not communicate the same measure of grace (Rom 12:3; 2Co 10:13; Eph 4:16) or the same number of talents to all alike. God's children differ from each other as children do at their natural birth; some of whom are more lively and vigorous than others. God, according to His sovereign pleasure, gives to some a fuller knowledge, to others stronger faith, to others warmer affections—natural temperament has much to do with the form and color which the manifestation of the "spirit" takes through us. But there is no difference in their state: the same work has been performed in all, which radically differentiates them from worldlings.

"Do ye not know that the saints shall judge the world?" (I Cor 6:2). Does not this clearly denote, yea, require, that the "saints" shall exercise a distinguishing holiness and live quite otherwise than the world? Could one who now takes the Lord's name in vain be righteously appointed to sit in judgment upon those who profane it? Could one who lives to please self be a fit person to judge those who have loved pleasure more than God? Could one who has despised and ridiculed 'puritanic strictness of living,' sit with Christ as a judge on those who lived in rebellion against Him? Never; instead of being the judges of others, all such will find themselves condemned and executed as malefactors in that Day.

"The LORD will give grace and glory: no good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly" (Psa 84:11). "Grace and glory" are inseparably connected: they differ not in nature, but in degree. "Grace" is glory begun; "glory" is grace elevated to the acme of perfection. 1 John 3:2 tells us that the saints shall be "like him," and this, because they will "see him as he is." The immediate vision of the Lord of glory will be a transforming one, the bright reflections of God's purity and holiness cast upon the glorified will make them perfectly holy and blessed. But this resemblance to God, His saints do here, in measure, bear upon them: there are some outlines, some lineaments of God's image stamped upon them, and this, too, is through beholding Him. True, it is (comparatively speaking) through a glass darkly, yet "beholding," we "are changed into the same image from glory to glory [from one degree of it to another], as by the Spirit of the Lord" (2Co 3:18).

In conclusion, let both writer and reader test and search himself in the presence of God, by these questions. How stands my heart affected toward sin? Is there a deep humiliation and godly sorrow after I have yielded thereto? Is there a genuine detestation of it? Is my conscience tender, so that my peace is disturbed by what the world calls “trifling faults” and “little things?” Am I humbled when conscious of the rising of pride and self-will? Do I loathe my inward corruption? What engages my mind in seasons of recreation? Are my affections dead toward the world and alive toward God? Do I find spiritual exercises pleasant and joyous or irksome and burdensome? Can I truthfully say, “How sweet are thy words unto my taste! yea, sweeter than honey to my mouth!” (Psa 119:103)? Is communion with God my highest joy? Is the glory of God dearer to me than all the world? ❧

Available in print as a booklet from Chapel Library.

The Sovereignty of God Defined

“Thine, O LORD, is the greatness, and the power, and the glory, and the victory, and the majesty: for all that is in the heaven and in the earth is thine; thine is the kingdom, O LORD, and thou art exalted as head above all.”—1 Chronicles 29:11

The sovereignty of God is an expression that once was generally understood. It was a phrase commonly used in religious literature. It was a theme frequently expounded in the pulpit. It was a truth which brought comfort to many hearts, and gave virility and stability to Christian character. But, today, to make mention of God’s sovereignty is, in many quarters, to speak in an unknown tongue. Were we to announce from the average pulpit that the subject of our discourse would be the sovereignty of God, it would sound very much as though we had borrowed a phrase from one of the dead languages. Alas! that it should be so. Alas! that the doctrine which is the key to history, the interpreter of providence, the warp and woof of Scripture, and the foundation of Christian theology should be so sadly neglected and so little understood.

The sovereignty of God—what do we mean by this expression? We mean the supremacy of God, the kingship of God, the god-hood of God. To say that God is sovereign is to declare that God is God. To say that God is sovereign is to declare that He is the Most High, doing according to His will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth, so that none can stay His hand or say unto Him what doest Thou? (Dan 4:35). To say that God is sovereign is to declare that He is the Almighty, the Possessor of all

power in heaven and earth, so that none can defeat His counsels, thwart His purpose, or resist His will (Psa 115:3). To say that God is sovereign is to declare that He is “the governor among the nations” (Psa 22:28), setting up kingdoms, overthrowing empires, and determining the course of dynasties as pleaseth Him best. To say that God is sovereign is to declare that He is the “only Potentate, the King of kings, and Lord of lords” (1Ti 6:15). Such is the God of the Bible.

How different is the God of the Bible from the God of modern Christendom! The conception of deity which prevails most widely today, even among those who profess to give heed to the Scriptures, is a miserable caricature, a blasphemous travesty of the truth. The God of the twentieth century is a helpless, effeminate being who commands the respect of no really thoughtful man. The God of the popular mind is the creation of maudlin sentimentality. The God of many a present-day pulpit is an object of pity rather than of awe-inspiring reverence. To say that God the Father has purposed the salvation of all mankind, that God the Son died with the express intention of saving the whole human race, and that God the Holy Spirit is now seeking to win the world to Christ; when, as a matter of common observation, it is apparent that the great majority of our fellowmen are dying in sin, and passing into a hopeless eternity; is to say that God the Father is *disappointed*, that God the Son is *dissatisfied*, and that God the Holy Spirit is *defeated*. We have stated the issue baldly, but there is no escaping the conclusion. To argue that God is “trying His best” to save all mankind, but that the majority of men will not let Him save them, is to insist that the will of the Creator is impotent, and that the will of the creature is omnipotent. To throw the blame, as many do, upon the devil, does not remove the difficulty, for if Satan is defeating the purpose of God, then, Satan is almighty and God is no longer the Supreme Being.

To declare that the Creator’s original plan has been frustrated by sin, is to *dethrone* God. To suggest that God was taken by surprise in Eden and that He is now attempting to remedy an unforeseen calamity, is to *degrade* the Most High to the level of a finite, erring mortal. To argue that man is a free moral agent and the determiner of his own destiny, and that therefore he has the power to checkmate his Maker, is to *strip* God of the attribute of omnipotence. To say that the creature has burst the bounds assigned by his Creator, and that God is now practically a helpless spectator before the sin and suffering entailed by Adam’s fall, is to *repudiate* the express declaration of Holy Writ, namely, “Surely the wrath of man shall praise thee: the remainder of wrath *shalt* thou restrain” (Psa 76:10). In a word, to deny the sovereignty of God is to enter upon a path which, if followed to its logical terminus, is to arrive at blank atheism.

The sovereignty of the God of Scripture is absolute, irresistible, and infinite. When we say that God is sovereign we affirm His right to govern the universe which He has made for His own glory, just as He pleases. We affirm that *His right* is the right of the potter over the clay, i.e., that He may mold that clay into whatsoever form He chooses, fashioning out of *the same lump* one vessel unto honor and another unto dishonor. We affirm that He is under no rule or law outside of His own will and nature, *that God is a*

law unto Himself, and that He is under no obligation to give an account of His matters to any.

Sovereignty characterizes the whole being of God. He is sovereign in all His attributes.

God is sovereign in the exercise of His power.

His power is exercised *as* He wills, *when* He wills, *where* He wills. This fact is evidenced on every page of Scripture. For a long season that power appears to be dormant, and then it is put forth in irresistible might. Pharaoh dared to hinder Israel from going forth to worship Jehovah in the wilderness—what happened? God exercised His power, His people were delivered and their cruel task-masters slain. But a little later, the Amalekites dared to attack these same Israelites in the wilderness, and what happened? Did God put forth His power on this occasion and display His hand as He did at the Red Sea? Were these enemies of His people promptly overthrown and destroyed? No, on the contrary, the Lord swore that He would “have war with Amalek *from generation to generation*” (Exo 17:16). Again, when Israel entered the land of Canaan, *God’s* power was signally displayed. The city of Jericho barred their progress—what happened? Israel did not draw a bow nor strike a blow: the Lord stretched forth His hand and the walls fell down flat. But the miracle was never repeated! *No other city fell after this manner*. Every other city had to be captured by the sword!

Many other instances might be adduced illustrating the sovereign exercise of God’s power. Take one other example. God put forth His power and David was delivered from Goliath, the giant; the mouths of the lions were closed and Daniel escaped unhurt; the three Hebrew children were cast into the burning fiery furnace and came forth unharmed and unscorched. *But God’s power did not always interpose for the deliverance of His people*, for we read: “*And others* had trial of cruel mockings and scourgings, yea, moreover of bonds and imprisonment: they were stoned, they were sawn asunder, were tempted, were slain with the sword; they wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins; being destitute, afflicted, tormented” (Heb 11:36-37). But why? Why were not these men of faith delivered like the others? Or, why were not the others suffered to be killed like these? Why should God’s power interpose and rescue some and not the others? Why allow Stephen to be stoned to death, and then deliver Peter from prison?

God is sovereign in the delegation of His power *to others*. Why did God endow Methuselah with a vitality which enabled him to outlive all his contemporaries? Why did God impart to Samson a physical strength which no other human has ever possessed? Again; it is written, “But thou shalt remember the LORD thy God: for it is he that *giveth thee power* to get wealth” (Deu 8:18), but God does not bestow this power on all alike. Why not? Why has He given such power to men like Morgan, Carnegie, Rockefeller? The answer to all of these questions is, Because God is sovereign, and being sovereign He does as He pleases.

God is sovereign in the exercise of His mercy.

Necessarily so, for mercy is directed by the *will* of Him that showeth mercy. Mercy is not a *right* to which man is entitled. Mercy is that adorable attribute of God by which He pities and relieves the wretched. But under the righteous government of God no one is wretched who does not *deserve* to be so. The objects of mercy, then, are those who are miserable, and all misery is the result of *sin*, hence the miserable are deserving of punishment not mercy. To speak of *deserving mercy* is a contradiction of terms.

God bestows His mercies on whom He pleases and withholds them as seemeth good unto Himself. A remarkable illustration of this fact is seen in the manner that God responded to the prayers of two men offered under very similar circumstances. Sentence of death was passed upon Moses for one act of disobedience, and he besought the Lord for a reprieve. But was his desire gratified? No; he told Israel, “The LORD was wroth with me for your sakes, *and would not hear me*: and the LORD said unto me, Let it suffice thee” (Deu 3:26). Now mark the second case: “In those days was Hezekiah sick unto death. And the prophet Isaiah the son of Amoz came to him, and said unto him, Thus saith the LORD, Set thine house in order; for thou shalt die, and not live. Then he turned his face to the wall, and prayed unto the LORD, saying, I beseech Thee, O LORD, remember now how I have walked before Thee in truth and with a perfect heart, and have done that which is good in Thy sight. And Hezekiah wept sore. And it came to pass, afore Isaiah was gone out into the middle court, that the word of the LORD came to him, saying, Turn again, and tell Hezekiah the captain of my people, Thus saith the LORD, the God of David thy father, *I have heard thy prayer*, I have seen thy tears: behold, I will heal thee: on the third day thou shalt go unto the house of the LORD. And I will add unto thy days fifteen years” (2Ki 20:1-6). Both of these men had the sentence of death in themselves, and both prayed earnestly unto the Lord for a reprieve: the one wrote: “The Lord would not hear me,” and died; but to the other it was said, “I have heard thy prayer,” and his life was spared. What an illustration and exemplification of the truth expressed in Romans 9:15!—“For he saith to Moses, I will have mercy *on whom I will have mercy*, and I will have compassion *on whom I will have compassion*.”

The sovereign exercise of God’s mercy—pity shown to the wretched—was displayed when Jehovah became flesh and tabernacled among men. Take one illustration. During one of the feasts of the Jews, the Lord Jesus went up to Jerusalem. He came to the pool of Bethesda where lay “*a great multitude* of impotent folk, of blind, halt, withered, waiting for the moving of the water.” Among this “great multitude” there was “a certain man...which had an infirmity thirty and eight years.” What happened? “When Jesus saw *him* lie for He, and knew that he had been now a long time in that case, he saith unto *him*, Wilt thou be made whole? The impotent man answered him, Sir, I have no man, when the water is troubled, to put me into the pool: but when I am coming, another steppeth down before me. Jesus saith unto him, Rise, take up thy bed, and walk. And immediately the man was made whole, and took up his bed, and walked” (Joh 5:3-9). Why was this one man singled out from all the others? We are not told that he cried

“Lord, have mercy on me.” There is not a word in the narrative which intimates that this man possessed any qualifications which entitled him to receive special favor. Here then was a case of the sovereign exercise of divine mercy, for it was just as easy for Christ to heal the whole of that “great multitude” as this one “certain man.” But He did not. He put forth His power and relieved the wretchedness of this one particular sufferer, and for some reason known only to Himself, He declined to do the same for the others. Again, we say, what an illustration and exemplification of Romans 9:15!—“I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion.”

God is sovereign in the exercise of His love.

Ah! that is a hard saying, who then can receive it? It is written, “A man can receive nothing, except it be given him from heaven” (Joh 3:27). When we say that God is sovereign in the exercise of His love, we mean that He loves whom He chooses. God does not love everybody²¹; if He did, He would love the devil. Why does not God love the devil? Because there is nothing in him *to love*; because there is nothing in him to *attract* the heart of God. Nor is there anything to *attract* God’s love in any of the fallen sons of Adam, for *all* of them are, by nature, “children of *wrath*” (Eph 2:3). If then there is nothing in any member of the human race to attract God’s love, and if, notwithstanding, He *does* love *some*, then it necessarily follows that the cause of His love must be found in Himself, which is only another way of saying that the exercise of God’s love towards the fallen sons of men is according to His own good pleasure.

In the final analysis, the exercise of God’s love *must* be traced back to His sovereignty or, otherwise, He would *love by rule*; and if He loved by rule, then is He under a *law of love*, and if He is under a *law* of love then is He not supreme, but is Himself *ruled* by law. “But,” it may be asked, “Surely you do not *deny* that God loves the entire human family?” We reply, it is written, “Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated” (Rom 9:13). If then God loved Jacob and hated Esau, and that before they were born or had done either good or evil, then the *reason* for His love was not in them, but in Himself.

That the exercise of God’s love is according to His own sovereign pleasure is also clear from the language of Ephesians 1:3-5, where we read, “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ: According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him *in love*. *Having predestinated* us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself *according to the good pleasure of his will*.” It was “*in love*” that God the Father predestined His chosen ones unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to Himself, “according”—according to what? According to *some excellency* He discovered in them? No. What then? According to what He *foresaw* they would become? No; mark carefully the inspired answer—“According to the good pleasure of *his will*.”

²¹ John 3:16 will be examined later.

We are not unmindful of the fact that men have invented the distinction between God's love of *complacency* and His love of *compassion*, but this *is an* invention pure and simple. *Scripture* terms the latter God's "pity" (see Mat 18:33), and "He is *kind unto* the unthankful and the evil" (Luk 6:35)!

God is sovereign in the exercise of His grace.

This of necessity, for grace is favor shown to the *undeserving*, yea, to the hell-deserving. Grace is the antithesis of justice. Justice demands the impartial enforcement of law. Justice requires that each shall receive his legitimate due, neither more nor less. Justice bestows no favors and is no respecter of persons. Justice, as such, shows no pity and knows no mercy. But after justice has been fully satisfied, grace flows forth. Divine grace is not exercised at the expense of justice, but "grace reigns through righteousness" (Rom 5:21), and if grace "*reigns*," then is grace sovereign.

Grace has been defined as the unmerited favor of God²²; and if unmerited, then none can claim it as their inalienable *right*. If grace is unearned and undeserved, then none are *entitled* to it. If grace is a gift, then none can *demand* it. Therefore, as salvation is by grace, the free gift of God, then He bestows it on whom He pleases. Because salvation is by grace, the very chief of sinners is not beyond the reach of divine mercy. Because salvation is by grace, boasting is excluded and God gets all the glory.

The sovereign exercise of grace is illustrated on nearly every page of Scripture. The Gentiles are left to walk in their own ways while Israel becomes the covenant people of Jehovah. Ishmael the firstborn is cast out comparatively unblest, while Isaac the son of his parents' old age is made the child of promise. Esau the generous-hearted and forgiving-spirited is denied the blessing, though he sought it carefully with tears, while the worm Jacob receives the inheritance and is fashioned into a vessel of honor. So in the New Testament divine truth is hidden from the wise and prudent, but is revealed to babes. The Pharisees and Sadducees are left to go their own way, while publicans and harlots are drawn by the cords of love.

In a remarkable manner, divine grace was exercised at the time of the Saviour's birth. The incarnation of God's Son was one of the greatest events in the history of the universe, and yet its actual occurrence was not made known to all mankind; instead, it was specially revealed to the Bethlehem shepherds and wise men of the East. And this was prophetic and indicative of the entire course of this dispensation, for even today Christ is not made known to all. It would have been an easy matter for God to have sent

²² An esteemed friend who kindly read through this book in its manuscript form, and to whom we are indebted for a number of excellent suggestions, has pointed out that grace is something more than "unmerited favor." To feed a tramp who calls on me is "unmerited favor," but it is scarcely *grace*. But suppose that after *robbing* me I should feed this starving tramp—that would be "grace." Grace, then, is favor shown where there is positive de-merit in the one receiving it.

a company of angels to *every nation* and to have announced the birth of His Son. But He did not. God could have readily attracted the attention of all mankind to the “star”; but He did not. Why? Because God is sovereign and dispenses His favors as He pleases. Note particularly the two classes to whom the birth of the Saviour *was* made known, namely, the most *unlikely* classes—illiterate shepherds and heathen from a far country. No angel stood before the Sanhedrin and announced the advent of Israel's Messiah! No “star” appeared unto the scribes and lawyers as they, in their pride and self-righteousness, searched the Scriptures! They searched diligently to find out where He should be born, and yet it was not made known *to them* when He was actually come. What a display of divine sovereignty—the illiterate shepherds singled out for peculiar honor, and the learned and eminent passed by! And *why* was the birth of the Saviour revealed to these foreigners, and not to those in whose midst He was born? See in this a wonderful foreshadowing of God's dealings with our race throughout the entire Christian dispensation—sovereign in the exercise of His grace, bestowing His favors on whom He pleases, often on the most unlikely and unworthy.²³ ❧

From The Sovereignty of God (chapter 1), paperback available in print from Chapel Library.

The Atoning Sacrifice of Christ

It is unspeakably sad that the atoning death of the Lord Jesus Christ—the most wonderful event that has ever happened or will happen—should have been made the occasion of contention and controversy. That it has been so affords an awful example of human depravity. The more so, that throughout the centuries of this Christian era, some of the hottest theological battles have been waged over the vital truth of the Atonement.

Speaking generally, only two views or interpretations of the Cross have received much favor among the professed people of God: the one which affirmed that the Atonement effected to make *certain* the salvation of all who believe; the other which supposed that atonement was made in order to make *possible* the salvation of all men. The former

²³ It has been pointed out to us that God's sovereignty was signally displayed in His choice of *the place* where His Son was born. Not to Greece or Italy did the Lord of Glory come, but to the insignificant land of Palestine! Not in Jerusalem—the royal city—was Immanuel born, but in Bethlehem, which was “*little among the thousands [of towns and villages] in Judah*” (Mic 5:2)! And it was in despised *Nazareth* that He grew up! Truly, God's ways are not ours.

is the strict Calvinist view; the latter, the Arminian. Even here, the difference was not merely one of terms, but of truth over against error. The one is definite and explicit; the other indefinite and intangible. The one affirms an Atonement which actually atones (i.e. fully satisfied God for those on whose behalf it was made); the other predicates an Atonement which was a sorry failure, inasmuch as the majority of those on whose behalf it was supposed to be offered, perish notwithstanding. The logical and inevitable corollary of the one is a satisfied, because triumphant Savior; the other (if true) would lead, unavoidably, to a disappointed, because defeated Savior. The former interpretation was taught by such men as Wycliffe, Calvin, Latimer, Tyndale, John Bunyan, Owens, Doddridge, Jonathan Edwards, Toplady, Whitefield, Spurgeon, etc. The latter by men who, as theologians, were not worthy to unloose their shoes.

A New Theory

Of late, a new theory has been propounded to the Christian public, a theory which approximates perilously near that of the Universalists.²⁴ Erroneously based upon a few texts whose scope is confined to the people of God, the view which is now rapidly gaining favor in circles which is regarded as orthodox,²⁵ is to the effect that, at the Cross, the sin question was fully and finally settled. We are told, and told by men who are looked up to by many as the champions of orthodoxy, that all the sins of all men were laid upon the crucified Christ. It is boldly affirmed that at the Cross the Lamb of God did as much for those who would not believe, as He did for those who should believe on Him. It is dogmatically announced that the only grievance which God now has against any man, is his refusal to believe in the Savior. It is said that the single issue between God and the world, is not the sin question, but the Son question.

We have said that this theory of the Atonement is a new one, and new it surely is. So far as the writer is aware, it was never propounded, at least in orthodox circles, till within the last two or three decades. It appears to be another product of this twentieth century, and like most if not all other of them, it is far inferior to what went before. Yet, strange to say, an appeal is made to the Holy Scriptures in support of it. But in one way we are thankful for this, inasmuch as the Word of God supplies us with an infallible rule by which we may measure it. We shall, therefore, examine this strange and novel theory in the light of Holy Writ, and doing this, it will not be difficult to show how thoroughly untenable and fallacious it is.

Problems with an Unlimited Atonement

1. If ALL the sins of ALL men were laid upon Christ, then the sin of unbelief was too. That unbelief is a sin is clear from the fact that in 1 John 3:23 we read: "And this is his commandment, that we should believe on the name of his Son Jesus Christ." Refusal to

²⁴ **Universalists** – those who believe that all men will be in heaven.

²⁵ **orthodox** – according with the historic doctrines of Scripture.

believe in Christ is, therefore, an act of flagrant disobedience, rebellion against the Most High. But if all the sins of all men were laid upon Christ (as it is now asserted), then He also endured the penalty for the Christ-rejector's unbelief. If this be so, then Universalism is true. But it is not so. The very advocates of the view we are now refuting would not affirm it. And therein may be seen the inconsistency and untenableness of their teaching. For if unbelief is a sin and Christ did not suffer the penalty of it, then all sin was not laid upon Christ. Thus there are only two alternatives: a strictly limited Atonement, availing only for believers; or an unlimited Atonement which effectually secures the salvation of the entire human race.

2. If ALL the sins of ALL men were laid upon Christ, how could He say, "The blasphemy against the Holy Ghost shall not be forgiven unto men" (Mat 12:31)? Observe that Christ here used the future tense, "shall not be." Note, too, He did not merely say to the blaspheming Jews that He was then addressing, "shall not be forgiven unto *you*," but in order to take in all others who should be guilty of this sin, He said, "shall not be forgiven unto *men*." It is worse than idle to raise the cavil²⁶ that the sin here spoken of was peculiar and exceptional, i.e., committed only by the Jews there addressed. The fact that this solemn utterance of Christ is found not only in Matthew, but in Mark, and also in Luke, the Gentile²⁷ Gospel, disposes of it.

Without attempting to define here the precise nature of this sin of blasphemy against the Holy Ghost, it is sufficient now to point out that it is a sin quite distinct from unbelief. In Scripture "blasphemy" is always an act of the lips, not merely of the mind or the will. For our present purpose, it is enough to call attention to the undeniable fact that none other than the Savior Himself here tells us there is a sin (other than unbelief) "which shall not be forgiven unto men." This being so, then it is obviously a mistake, a serious error, to say that all sin was laid on Christ and atoned for.

3. If ALL the sins of ALL men were laid upon Christ, how could He possibly say to certain ones, "Ye shall seek me, and shall die in your sins" (Joh 8:21)? Christ was here addressing the Pharisees. The time was only a short while before His death. He was speaking, therefore, of that which lay on the other side of His crucifixion and resurrection. This is seen from the fact that He first said, "I go my way, and ye shall seek me." Most evidently He was referring to His return to the Father. And He expressly declared that after His departure from this world, these men would "seek" Him (but in vain), and they would die in their sins. Their death would be subsequent to His, and their death would be in sins. The striking thing is, that these awful words were uttered, on this same occasion, no less than three times. For in John 8:24 we read, "I said therefore unto you, That ye shall die in your sins: for if ye believe not that I am, ye shall die in your sins."

²⁶ **cavil** – a futile objection raised in order to win an argument.

²⁷ **Gentile** – in the Scriptures, any person not a Jew (signified for males by not receiving Jewish circumcision). Luke was a Gentile, not a Jew.

Note, carefully “die,” not in your sin, but “in your sins.” Here, then, is another indubitable proof that Christ did not bear all the sins of all men.

4. If ALL the sins of ALL men were laid upon Christ, why did the apostle Paul (under the Holy Spirit) write, “For this ye know, that no whoremonger, nor unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolator, hath any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God? Let no man deceive you with vain words: for because of these things cometh the wrath of God upon the children of disobedience” (Eph 5:5-6)? The “children of disobedience” (cf. Eph 2:2) is a name for unbelievers. It views them as rebels against God. The passage now before us tells us why “the wrath of God” shall come upon them—“because of these things;” it looks back to what had been specified in the previous verses. God’s wrath would yet descend upon them not only because of their rejection of Christ, but because they had been guilty of sins of immorality and covetousness.

It is remarkable that verse 6 begins with the words, “Let no man deceive you with vain words.” It certainly looks as though the Holy Spirit was here anticipating and repudiating this modern perversion of God’s truth. Men do now tell us that no wrath from God will ever fall on men because of the sins of immorality and covetousness. Men now tell us that God’s wrath for all sins came upon Christ. But when men tell us such things, none other than the Holy Spirit declares that they are “vain [empty] words.” They are empty words because there is no truth in them! Then let us not be deceived by them.

5. If ALL the sins of ALL men were laid upon Christ, then Stephen wasted his dying breath when he prayed, “Lay not this sin to their charge” (Act 7:60). The sin referred to was their stoning of him, which was murder. But perhaps Stephen was not acquainted with this modern sophistry. Certainly he did not believe it. Had He believed that all sin had been “laid” on Christ, he would not have cried “lay not this sin to their charge,” i.e., let not them suffer the penalty of it.

6. If ALL the sins of ALL men were laid upon Christ, what did the apostle mean when he said of the Jews, who forbade him to speak to the Gentiles that they might be saved, “to fill up their sins alway” (1Th 2:16)? If language has any meaning, these words of the apostle signify that the Jews were adding sins to sins. He did not say “to fill up their sin,” but, “to fill up their sins.” Clearly, there was no place in his theology for this strange invention of the twentieth century.

7. If ALL the sins of ALL men were laid upon Christ, what did the apostle mean when he said, “Some men’s sins are open beforehand, going before to judgment” (1Ti 5:24)? One thing he meant was that no atonement had been made for them. Mark, again, he is speaking, not of sin, but “sins,” and these, he declared, are “going before to judgment.” Nothing could be plainer. These “sins” had not been “judged” at the Cross, therefore, they must be judged in the Day of Judgment.

8. If ALL the sins of ALL men were laid upon Christ, then why will a voice from heaven yet say to the godly Jews who shall be found in Babylon at the end time, “Come out of her, My people, that ye be not partaker of her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues. For her sins have reached unto heaven, and God hath remembered her iniquities” (Rev

18:4-5)? Here is proof positive that the theory that we are now rebutting is not the theology of heaven. Here is proof positive that the “sins” of Babylon were not laid on Christ. Here is proof positive that Christ was not “bruised” for her “iniquities,” for God would not punish twice for the same sins.

9. If ALL the sins of ALL men were laid upon Christ, then God would not have dealt in judicial wrath with Israel because of the sins of their forefathers. But He did do so; and He did so after the crucifixion of His Son. No less than Christ Himself is our authority for this: “Therefore also saith the wisdom of God, I will send them prophets and apostles, and some of them they shall slay and persecute: That the blood of all the prophets, which was shed from the foundation of the world, may be required of this generation; From the blood of Zacharias, which perished between the altar and the temple: verily I say unto you, it shall be required of this generation” (Luk 11:49-51). This passage teaches plainly that the punishment for the accumulated sins of their forefathers was to fall upon a single generation of the Jews. Christ confirmed this by saying, “It shall be required of this generation.” But if atonement was made for all sins at the Cross, then all of this would have been cancelled (remitted). That it was not so cancelled we know from the authenticated fact that in A.D. 70²⁸ this solemn threat was executed, and God did “require” this at the hands of the Jews then living.

10. If ALL the sins of ALL men were laid upon Christ, then wherein lies the need for and wherein would be the propriety of the dead being “judged according to their works” (Rev 20:12)? If the only issue between God and the world is their attitude toward Christ; if the only ground of condemnation for men be the rejection of the divinely appointed Savior, then it would be meaningless, or worse, to arraign them for their works. The fact that Holy Writ does declare that the wicked shall yet be judged “according to their works” is incontestable evidence that they will have more to answer for, and will suffer for something more than their rejection of Christ.

11. If ALL the sins of ALL men were laid upon Christ, how could there possibly be any degrees of punishment for the lost? If the only sin which God now imputes to the wicked be their rejection of Christ, then one common guilt would rest upon all, and consequently one common punishment would be their portion. That there will be degrees of punishment among the lost is clearly established by the following Scriptures: Matthew 11:22, “It shall be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon at the day of judgment, than for you.” Mark 12:40, “These shall receive greater damnation.” Luke 12:47-48, “And that servant, which knew his lord’s will, and prepared not himself, neither did according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes.” Hebrews 10:28-29, “He that despised Moses’ law died without mercy under two or three witnesses: Of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God?”

²⁸ **A.D. 70** – within 40 years of Christ’s resurrection, when the Roman army destroyed Jerusalem, its Temple, and much of its people.

12. If ALL the sins of ALL men were laid upon Christ, and the only sin which God now imputes to any is the refusal to receive His Son, then it inevitably follows that all the heathen who have lived since the crucifixion and have never heard of Christ, will certainly be saved. There is no other alternative possible. Not having heard of Christ, they cannot be charged of rejecting Him, and if all their other sins were atoned for (as we are asked to believe) then, necessarily, they must stand guiltless before God. But if this were true, then John 14:6 would be untrue, for there the recorded declaration of Christ is, "No man cometh unto the Father but by Me."

Limited Atonement

Having shown that this latest theory of the Atonement cannot be true—cannot because it manifestly clashes with the twelve Scriptures quoted above and with others that might be quoted—we shall now examine some passages which are appealed to in support of it.

1. Isaiah 53:6

"The Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all" (Isa 53:6). Notice that this verse does not say: "The Lord hath laid on Him the iniquities of all," which is what some men twist it to mean. No, instead of so saying, the "all" is definitely and carefully qualified thus: "The Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all." Who the "us" refers to is made plain in the next verse: "For the transgression of my people was he stricken" (Isa 53:8). If further proof be required that the "all" is limited, it is furnished by another statement in the same chapter, for in verse 12 we read: "And he bare the sin of many." This restriction is meaningless if Christ bore the sin of everybody.

2. John 1:29

"Behold the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world" (Joh 1:29). Again we ask the reader to note carefully the exact wording of this sentence: it is not (as so often misquoted) "The Lamb of God which taketh the sins of the world," but "the *sin* of the world." The word sin is used in the New Testament in several ways. Sometimes the reference is to the sinful nature, as in Hebrews 4:15, 1 John 1:8, etc. Sometimes it is the sinful act which is in view, as in James 1:15, etc. At other times "sin" refers to the guilt or penalty of sin, as in Romans 3:9, 6:10; 2 Corinthians 5:21. It is in this last sense "sin" is used in John 1:29. The definite article (in the Greek and in the English) makes this clear. The Lamb of God which beareth away *the* guilt and consequent penalty, is the thought.

But now, what is meant by "taketh away the sin of the *world*"? Does it mean that the Lamb of God took away the guilt of the whole human race? If it does, then the whole human race will most certainly be saved—unpunished sin (and its defilement) is the only thing which would keep any man out of heaven. But if "the world" does not mean the whole human race, what does it refer to? We answer: It is a general, an indefinite expression, used, first, in contrast with Israel. "It is not 'the Lamb of God who taketh away the

sin of Israel,' but the sin of 'the world'—of any kind of men" (Mr. F.W. Grant). The "world" here takes in believing sinners of the Gentiles, as well as believing Jews.

That "the world" is a general and indefinite expression, rather than a synonym for the whole human race, is clear from its meaning in other passages in John's Gospel. For example, in John 7:4, "Show thyself to the world." Did they mean, "Show thyself to the whole human race"? Surely not. Again, "Behold the world is gone after him" (Joh 12:19). Did they mean the whole human race had gone after Him? Of course not. "I come not to judge the world but to save the world" (Joh 12:47). Did Christ mean that He had come to save the whole human race? How could He, when multitudes were even then in hell!

The Greek word for "world" in John 1:29 is "kosmos," and in its application to humankind in the New Testament, we find there are two "worlds"—a world of believers and a world of unbelievers. In 2 Peter 2:5 this expression is used, "bringing in the flood upon the world of the ungodly." Contrariwise, there is a world of the godly. This is the meaning of John 1:29, it was the sin (penalty) of the world of believers—Jewish believers and Gentile believers—that the Lamb of God took away. This is no novel interpretation of ours, but one so given by the Reformers and Puritans.

3. *John 3:18*

"He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God" (Joh 3:18). That refusal to believe in the name of God's Son is a ground of condemnation is not disputed. The question at issue is whether this is now the only ground of condemnation. John 3:18 does not say it is. Nor does any other passage. If it did, the Scriptures would contradict themselves, for as shown above, there are many passages which afford positive proof that God does reckon men guilty of other sins. The truth is, that man is "under condemnation" long before he ever hears of Christ: he is under condemnation from the hour of his birth. He is not only "shapen in iniquity and conceived in sin" (Psa 51:5), but he is also "estranged from the womb" (Psa 58:3). We not only inherit Adam's depravity, but we are also "by nature the children [not merely of 'corruption,' but] of wrath" (Eph 2:3). The unregenerate are not only devoid of any spiritual nature, they are also "alienated from the life of God" (Eph 4:18).

4. *2 Corinthians 5:19*

"God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them" (2Co 5:19). This verse need not detain us very long. Like John 1:29, a right understanding of it turns upon apprehending the true meaning and scope of "the world." The "world" which God reconciled by Christ was the world of believers. That unbelievers are not "reconciled" is clear from Ephesians 4:18 (and other Scriptures) which speaks of them being "alienated from the life of God." Again, in Romans 5:10 we are told, "Much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life." That is plain enough: those "reconciled" shall be saved! Further proof that the world here said to be reconciled does not take in the whole human race, is found in the fact that we are expressly told God

does not impute “their trespasses unto them.” But He does “impute” trespasses unto the children of disobedience, as is clear from Ephesians 5:6, etc. Psalm 32:1 tells us that the man is “blessed” unto whom the Lord “imputeth not iniquity.” But the unbeliever is not “blessed,” but cursed.

5. *1 John 2:2*

“And he is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world” (1Jo 2:2). This is the passage which, apparently, most favors the view we are now rebutting, and yet if it be considered attentively it will be seen that it does so only in appearance, and not in reality. Below we offer a number of conclusive proofs to show that this verse does not teach that Christ has propitiated God on behalf of all the sins of all men.

In the *first* place, the fact that this verse opens with “and” necessarily links it with what has gone before. We, therefore, give a literal, word for word translation of 1 John 2:1 from Bagster’s Interlinear: “Little children my, these things I write to you, that ye may not sin: and if any one should sin, a Paraclete we have with the Father, Jesus Christ [the] righteous.” It will thus be seen that the apostle John is here writing to and about the saints of God. His immediate purpose was two-fold: first to communicate a message that would keep God’s children from sinning; second, to supply comfort and assurance to those who might sin, and, in consequence, be cast down and fearful that the issue would prove fatal. He, therefore, makes known to them the provision which God has made for just such an emergency. This we find at the end of verse 1 and throughout verse 2. The ground of comfort is twofold: let the downcast and repentant believer (1Jo 1:9) be assured that, first, he has an “Advocate with the Father;” second, that this Advocate is “the propitiation for our sins.” Now believers only may take comfort from this, for they alone have an “Advocate,” for them alone is Christ the propitiation as is proven by linking the Propitiation (“and”) with “the Advocate”!

In the *second* place, if other passages in the New Testament, which speak of “propitiation” be compared with 1 John 2:2, it will be found that it is strictly limited in its scope. For example, in Romans 3:25 we read that God set forth Christ “a propitiation through faith in his blood.” If Christ is a propitiation “through faith,” then He is not a “propitiation” to those who have no faith! Again, we read, “To make propitiation for the sins of the people” (Heb 2:17, R.V.).

In the *third* place, who are meant when John says, “He is the propitiation for our sins”? We answer, Jewish believers. Part of the proof on which we base this assertion we now submit to the careful attention of the reader.

In Galatians 2:9 we are told that John, together with James and, Cephas, were apostles “unto the circumcision” (i.e. Israel). In keeping with this, the epistle of James is addressed to “the twelve tribes, which are scattered abroad” (1:1). So, the first epistle of Peter is addressed to “the elect who are sojourners of the Dispersion” (1Pe 1:1, R.V.). And John also is writing to saved Israelites.

Evidences that John is writing to saved Jews are:

(a) In the opening verse he says of Christ, “Which we have seen with our eyes...and our hands have handled.” How impossible it would have been for the apostle Paul to have commenced any of his epistles to Gentile saints with such language!

(b) “Brethren, I write no new commandment unto you, but an old commandment which ye had from the beginning” (2:7). The “beginning” here referred to is the beginning of the public manifestation of Christ—in proof compare 1:1, 2:13, etc. Now these believers, the apostle tells us, had the “old commandment” from the beginning. This was true of Jewish believers, but it was not true of Gentile believers.

(c) “I write unto you, fathers, because ye have known him from the beginning” (2:13). Here, again, it is evident that it is Jewish believers that are in view.

(d) “Little children, it is the last time: and as ye have heard that antichrist shall come, even now are there many antichrists; whereby we know that it is the last time. They went out from us, but they were not of us” (2:18-19). These brethren to whom John wrote had “heard” from Christ Himself that antichrist should come (see Mat 24). The “many antichrists” whom John declares “went out from us” were all Jews, for during the first century none but a Jew posed as the Messiah. Therefore, when he says “He is the propitiation for our sins,” he can only mean for the sins of Jewish believers.

In the *fourth* place, when John added, “And not for ours only, but also for the whole world,” he signified that Christ was the propitiation for the sins of the Gentile believers too, for, as previously shown, “the world” is a term contrasted from Israel. This interpretation is unequivocally established by a careful comparison of 1 John 2:2 with John 11:51-52, which is a strictly parallel passage: “And this spake he not of himself: but being high priest that year, he prophesied that Jesus should die for that nation; And not for that nation only, but that also he should gather together in one the children of God that were scattered abroad.” Here Caiaphas, under inspiration, made known for whom Jesus should “die.” Notice now the correspondence of his prophecy with this declaration of John’s:

“He is the propitiation for our [believing Israelites] sins.”

“He prophesied that Jesus should die for that nation.”

“And not for ours only.”

“And not for that nation only.”

“But also for the whole world.” [That is, Gentile believers who are scattered throughout the earth.]

“He should gather together in one the children of God that were scattered abroad.”

In the *fifth* place, the above interpretation is confirmed by the fact that no other is consistent or intelligible. If the “whole world” signifies the whole human race, then the first clause and the “also” in the second clause are absolutely meaningless. If Christ be the propitiation for everybody, it would be idle tautology²⁹ to say, first, He is the propitiation for our sins and also for everybody. There could be no “also” if He be the propitia-

²⁹ **tautology** – needless repetition of words with the same meaning.

tion for the entire human family. Had the apostle meant to affirm that Christ is a universal propitiation, he had omitted the first clause of verse 2, and simply said, "He is the propitiation for the sins of the whole world."

In the *sixth* place, our definition of "the whole world" is in perfect accord with other passages in the New Testament. For example: "Whereof ye heard before in the word of the truth of the gospel; which is come unto you, as it is in all the world" (Col 1:5-6). Does "all the world" here mean, absolutely and unqualifiedly, all mankind? Had all the human family heard the Gospel? No; the apostle's obvious meaning is that the Gospel, instead of being confined to the land of Judea, had gone abroad, without restraint, into Gentile lands. So in Romans 1:8: "First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all, that your faith is spoken of throughout the whole world." The apostle is here referring to the faith of these Roman saints being spoken of in a way of commendation. But certainly all mankind did not so speak of their faith! It was the whole world of believers that he was referring to! In Revelation 12:9 we read of Satan "which deceiveth the whole world." But again this expression cannot be understood as a universal one, for Matthew 24:24 tells us that Satan does not and cannot "deceive" God's elect. Here it is "the whole world" of unbelievers.

In the *seventh* place, to insist that "the whole world" in 1 John 2:2 signifies the entire human race is to undermine the very foundations of our faith. If Christ be the propitiation for those that are lost equally as much as for those that are saved, then what assurance have we that believers too may not be lost? If Christ be the propitiation for those now in hell, what guarantee have I that I may not end in hell? The blood-shedding of the incarnate Son of God is the only thing which can keep any one out of hell, and if many for whom that precious blood made propitiation are now in the awful place of the damned, then may not that blood prove inefficacious for me! Away with such a God-dishonoring thought!

Conclusion

However men may quibble and wrest the Scriptures, one thing is certain: The Atonement is no failure. God will not allow that precious and costly sacrifice to fail in accomplishing, completely, that which it was designed to effect. Not a drop of that holy blood was shed in vain. In the last great Day there shall stand forth no disappointed and defeated Savior, but One Who "shall see the travail of his soul and be satisfied" (Isa 53:11).

These are not our words, but the infallible assertion of Him Who declares, "My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure" (Isa 46:10). Upon this impregnable rock we take our stand. Let others rest on the sands of human speculation and theorizing if they wish. But to God they will yet have to render an account. For our part we had rather be railed at as a narrow-minded, out-of-date hyper-Calvinist, than be found repudiating God's truth by reading the divinely-efficacious atonement to a mere fiction. Was the sin

question finally settled at the Cross? For every believer, Yes. For unbelievers, No, as they shall yet find to their cost. ❧

Available in print as a booklet from Chapel Library.

The Doctrine of Election

As the doctrine of election is a part of the wider subject of God's sovereignty, a brief word on this first. In Revelation 19:6 we are told, "the Lord God omnipotent reigneth." In heaven and earth, He is the Controller and Disposer of all creatures. As the Most High, He ruleth amid the armies of the heavens and none can stay His hand or say unto Him, "What doest thou?" (Job 9:12). He is the Almighty, who worketh all things after the counsel of His own will. He is the heavenly Potter who takes hold of our fallen humanity like a lump of clay, and out of it fashioneth one as a vessel unto honor and another as a vessel unto dishonor. In short, He is the Decider and Determiner of every man's destiny and the Controller of every detail in each individual's life, which is only another way of saying that God is God.

Now, election and predestination are but the exercise of God's sovereignty in the affairs of salvation, and all that we know about them is what has been revealed to us in the Scriptures of truth. The only reason why anyone believes in election is because he finds it clearly taught in God's Word. No man, or number of men, ever originated this doctrine. Like the teaching of eternal punishment, it conflicts with the dictates of the carnal mind and is repugnant to the sentiments of the unregenerate heart. And like the doctrine of the Holy Trinity and the miraculous birth of our Saviour, the truth of election must be received with simple, unquestioning faith.

Let us now define our terms. What does the word *election* mean? It signifies to single out, to select, to choose, to take one and leave another. Election means that God has singled out certain ones to be the objects of His saving grace, while others are left to suffer the just punishment of their sins. It means that before the foundation of the world, God chose out of the mass of our fallen humanity a certain number and predestined them to be conformed to the image of His Son. "Simeon hath declared how God at the first did visit the Gentiles, to take out of them a people for his name" (Act 15:14).

We cannot do better than here amplify our definition of election by quoting from a sermon by the late C.H. Spurgeon (1834-1892) on "Things That Accompany Salvation":

“Before Salvation came into this world, Election marched in the very forefront, and it had for its work the billeting³⁰ of Salvation. Election went through the world and marked the houses to which Salvation should come and the hearts in which the treasure should be deposited. Election looked through all the race of man, from Adam down to the last, and marked with sacred stamp those for whom Salvation was designed. ‘He must needs go through Samaria’ (Joh 4:4) said Election; and Salvation must go there. Then came Predestination. Predestination did not merely mark the house, but it mapped the road in which Salvation should travel to that house. Predestination ordained every step of the great army of Salvation; it ordained the time when the sinner should be brought to Christ, the manner how he should be saved, the means that should be employed; it marked the exact hour and moment when God the Spirit should quicken the dead in sin, and when peace and pardon should be spoken through the blood of Jesus. Predestination marked the way so completely that Salvation doth never overstep the bounds, and it is never at a loss for the road. In the everlasting decree of the sovereign God, the footsteps of mercy were every one of them ordained.”

Why God selected these particular individuals rather than others, we do not know. His choice is a sovereign one, wholly gratuitous, and dependent upon nothing outside of Himself. It certainly was not because these particular individuals were, in themselves, any better than the others which He passed by. Scripture is very emphatic upon this point: they, too, “were by nature the children of wrath, even as others” (Eph 2:3). They, too, had no inherent righteousness. Neither did God choose the ones He did because of anything that He foresaw would be in them, for the simple but sufficient reason that He foresaw no good thing in them, save that which He Himself wrought in them. All that we can say is that God chose out certain ones to be saved solely because He chose to choose them, because such was the good pleasure of His sovereign will (Eph 1:5).

1. The Mystery of Election

That election is a profound mystery, we readily grant; that it is altogether beyond the power of the finite mind to fully comprehend, we freely acknowledge. Our feeling and our reasoning faculty cannot aid us in this inquiry. Yet this is no cause why we should refuse to believe what we cannot fully understand. We are surrounded by mystery on all sides. We cannot understand why God, Who is perfect and omniscient, Who at the beginning clearly foresaw all the fearful consequences of it, should have ever allowed sin to enter this world. But He did! To say, as many do, that if God created man a free moral agent, He could not prevent it, is an assertion which is utterly devoid of any foundation in God’s Word; and not only so, but it contradicts its explicit statements. For example: “Surely the wrath of man shall praise thee: the remainder of wrath shalt thou restrain”

³⁰ **billeting** – to quarter or place in lodgings.

(Psa 76:10). If God can restore to righteousness those who are the willing slaves of sin and have long indulged in the commission of it, without interfering with man's accountability, why then could He have not preserved sinless beings in a state of purity? And if it was in His power to do so, why did He not do it? All we can say is, "We do not know." God has not seen fit to tell us. The divine permission of sin is a profound mystery.

Nor is this the only mystery connected with the history of our race. The glaring inequalities in the lot of human existence are equally insoluble.³¹ One is born blind, another is blessed with sight. One enters the world endowed with a strong constitution and enjoys almost uninterrupted health, while another inherits an incurable disease and sinks into an early grave. One is born to wealth and all its comforts, another to poverty and its consequent miseries. One is born of criminal or infidel parents, while another is the child of true believers and is reared in the fear of the Lord. One is born amid heathen darkness, another enjoys the privileges of Gospel light. Now these differences not only affect happiness in this life, but they are among the determining factors of character and destiny, and yet they are not at all dependent upon the character or conduct of those concerned. When we ask ourselves, "Why are such differences permitted to exist? Why does God allow such inequalities?" again we have to answer, "We do not know." Yet we firmly believe that He has some good and wise reason for all His providential dealings, but to man in his present condition they are profoundly mysterious.

That God's dealings are mysterious, His own Word affirms. "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the LORD. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts" (Isa 55:8-9). And again the Holy Spirit, through the Apostle Paul, declares, "O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!" (Rom 11:33). Our true position, then, in investigating such a subject as this, is that of disciples—learners—sitting at the feet of the Lord Jesus that we may be taught by Him. If we accept the Bible as God's Word, we must expect to find in it "some things hard to be understood, which they that are unlearned and unstable wrest, as they do also the other scriptures, unto their own destruction" (2Pe 3:16).

2. The Truth of Election

The doctrine of election is clearly taught in God's Word; from cover to cover, the Bible is full of it. It is one of the great foundational doctrines of the Scriptures. The very first book in the Bible has God's sovereignty for its central theme. Cain the elder is passed by, while Abel the younger is accepted. Ham and Japheth are ignored, while Shem the youngest is selected for the line from which the Messiah was to come. To Abram the junior, not to Nahor the senior brother, is given the inheritance of Canaan. Ishmael the firstborn is cast out unblessed, while Isaac the child of his parents' old age is blessed.

³¹ **insoluble** – not to be solved or explained.

Esau the generous-hearted and forgiving-spirited is denied the blessing, though he sought it carefully with tears, while Jacob the treacherous, underhanded schemer is fashioned into a vessel of honor. Though the eleventh son, Joseph, is the one who receives the double portion, when Jacob, guided by God, is blessing Joseph's sons, Ephraim the younger is preferred before Manasseh the elder.

The limits of our space will not permit us to go right on through the Bible; we can only now quote a few sample texts, but they are sufficient. "I am found of them that sought me not" (Isa 65:1). "For many be called, but few chosen" (Mat 20:16). "Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you" (Joh 15:16). "I pray not for the world, but for them which thou hast given me" (Joh 17:9). "As many as were ordained to eternal life believed" (Act 13:48). "There is a remnant according to the election of grace" (Rom 11:5). "He hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him" (Eph 1:4).

During Old Testament times, the principle of divine election was clearly exhibited in God's dealings with the human race. At the Tower of Babel, God, for a time, abandoned His direct dealings with humanity as a whole, and singled out one man—Abraham—from whom descended the nation of Israel. This nation was His chosen people. He revealed Himself to them as to none other. Israel was His peculiar treasure. They enjoyed direct fellowship with Jehovah, while other nations were left to their sins. But why? Why should God single out Abraham's descendants to be the recipients of His special favors? Had they a greater natural claim than others? Assuredly not. The Egyptians were a far wiser race than the Hebrew nomads.³² The Chaldeans were more ancient, more numerous, more civilized, and albeit, exerted a much greater influence upon the rest of the world. Ah! But God passes by the wise and learned and chooses the weak and despised. Why? To demonstrate His sovereignty and exemplify His grace. Why? "That no flesh should glory in his presence" (1Co 1:29).

3. The Justice of Election

In every age there have been those who argued that the doctrine of election charges God with injustice. They say it is not fair that He should single out certain ones for eternal life and permit the balance to be eternally damned. But such a charge evidences gross ignorance and perverts the fundamental principles of the Gospel. Salvation is not a question of justice, but of grace. If the matter is to be settled on the ground of bare justice, then every child of Adam must perish, for: "all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God" (Rom 3:23).

To say that God has no right to single out only certain ones to be conformed to the image of His Son, is to repudiate³³ the cardinal³⁴ fact of the Gospel. Salvation is not a

³² **nomads** – those who lead a wandering life.

³³ **repudiate** – to cast away; to reject; to discard.

³⁴ **cardinal** – principal or fundamental.

wage which we must earn, nor a reward that we must merit. It is a free gift bestowed upon the undeserving. But the moment we grant that salvation is God's gift, we are logically compelled to accept the principle of election. Has not God a perfect right to dispense His gift as He pleases? Certainly He has. And not only is this His prerogative;³⁵ but He exercises it: "For he saith to Moses, I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion" (Rom 9:15). God is indebted to none. He is not under obligations to save any. If He delivers any from the wrath to come, it is solely due to His grace. He is under no constraint to save all if He would save any. If He chooses to pass by some, withholding the gift of salvation, then there is no ground for complaint. At the last great day every man will receive all the mercy to which he is entitled. Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right? Assuredly. The sentence passed upon those on the left hand will be a perfectly righteous one.

"Concerning this prerogative [His sovereignty] we may say, first, that to God belongs the right to exercise it. This right springs, first, from His being our Creator. He saith, 'all souls are mine' (Eze 18:4). He has an absolute right to do with us as He pleases, seeing 'it is he that hath made us, and not we ourselves' (Psa 100:3). Men forget what they are, and boast great things; but truly they are but clay on the potter's wheel, and He can fashion them or break them as He pleases. They think not so, but He knoweth their thoughts that they are vain. Oh, the dignity of man! What a theme for a sarcastic discourse! As the frog in the fable swelled itself till it burst asunder, so doth man in his pride and envy against his Maker, Who nevertheless sitteth upon the circle of the heavens, and reckoneth men as though they were grasshoppers, and regardeth whole nations of them as the small dust of the balance. The Lord's prerogative of creation is manifestly widened morally by our forfeiture³⁶ of any consideration which might have arisen out of obedience and rectitude³⁷ if we had possessed them. Our fault has involved forfeiture of the creature's claims, whatever they may have been. We are all attainted³⁸ of high treason, and we have each one been guilty of personal rebellion; therefore, we have not the rights of citizens, but lie under sentence of condemnation. What saith the infallible voice of God? 'Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them' (Gal 3:10). We have come under this curse; justice has pronounced us guilty, and by nature we abide under condemnation. If then the Lord shall be pleased to deliver us from death, it rests with Him to do so; but we have no right to any such deliverance, nor can we urge any argument which would avail in the courts of justice for reversal of sentence or stay of execution. Before the bar of justice our

³⁵ **prerogative** – an exclusive or peculiar privilege.

³⁶ **forfeiture** – the losing of some right.

³⁷ **rectitude** – rightness of principle or practice.

³⁸ **attainted** – stained; corrupted.

case must go hard if we set up any plea of right. We shall be driven away with the disdain of the impartial Judge if we urge our suit upon that line. Our wisest course is to appeal to His mercy and to His sovereign grace, for there alone is our hope. Understand me clearly: If the Lord shall suffer us all to perish, we shall only receive our deserts, and we have not one of us a shade of claim upon His mercy—we are therefore absolutely in His hands, and to Him belong the issues from death.” (C.H. Spurgeon, *The Royal Prerogative*—Psalm 68:20-21).

Finally, let it be remembered that God never refuses mercy to those who honestly seek it. It is true that the non-elect will be lost, let them do what they will. The sinner is bidden to “taste and see that the LORD is good” (Psa 34:8). He is freely invited to be a guest at the Gospel feast. The promise is wide and plain—“him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out” (Joh 6:37). But if the sinner will not come to Christ that he might have life, then his blood is upon his own head. If he will not believe, then it is his own will which damns him.

4. The Corollaries³⁹ of Election

The doctrine of election *magnifies the character of God*. It exemplifies His grace. Election makes known the fact that salvation is God’s free gift, gratuitously bestowed upon whom He pleases. This must be so, for those who receive it are themselves no different and no better than those who receive it not. Election allows some to go to hell to show that all deserved to perish. But grace comes in like a dragnet and draws out from a ruined humanity a great multitude, which no man can number, to be throughout eternity the monuments of God’s sovereign mercy.

It exhibits His omnipotency. Election makes known the fact that God is all powerful, ruling and reigning over the earth; and declares that none can successfully resist His will or thwart His secret purposes. Election reveals God breaking down the opposition of the human heart, subduing the enmity of the carnal mind, and with irresistible power drawing His chosen ones to Christ. Election confesses—“We love him, because he first loved us” (1Jo 4:19), and we believe, because He made us willing in the day of His power (Psa 110:3).

It ascribes all the glory to Him. It disallows any credit to the creature. It denies that the unregenerate are capable of predicating⁴⁰ a right thought, generating a right affection, or originating a right volition. It insists that God must work in us both to will and to do. It declares that repentance and faith are themselves God’s gifts, and not something which the sinner contributes towards the price of his salvation. Its language is, “Not unto us, O LORD, not unto us” (Psa 115:1), but, “unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood” (Rev 1:5).

³⁹ **corollaries** – conclusions drawn from premises.

⁴⁰ **predicating** – to base or establish something upon something else.

“The Lord makes distinctions among guilty men according to the sovereignty of His grace. “I will no more have mercy upon the house of Israel; but I will utterly take them away” (Hos 1:6). Had not Judah sinned too? Might not the Lord have given up Judah also! Indeed He might justly have done so, but He delighteth in mercy. Many sin, and righteously bring upon themselves the punishment due to sin: They believe not in Christ, and die in their sins. But God has mercy, according to the greatness of His heart, upon multitudes who could not be saved upon any other footing but that of undeserved mercy. Claiming His royal right, He says, “I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy” (Rom 9:15). The prerogative of mercy is vested in the sovereignty of God: that prerogative He exercises. He gives where He pleases, and He has a right to do so, since none have any claim upon Him.” (C.H. Spurgeon, *The Lord’s Own Salvation*—Hosea 1:7).

Finally, the doctrine guarantees *eternal preservation of all God’s saints*. In the Holy Scriptures, the question of our salvation is traced back (in the purpose of God) not to the moment when we believed—this is when it becomes ours experimentally—but to a point before time began. Before the foundation of the world, God chose us in Christ (Eph 1:4). “I have loved thee with an everlasting love: therefore with lovingkindness have I drawn thee” (Jer 31:3). This lifts the matter of our salvation out of time into eternity. Were it merely a thing of time, it would perish. But because it is a thing of eternity, it must endure forever. It is impossible to imagine a stick with only one end to it; that which is eternal must be so at both ends. So God’s Word affirms “whom he did predestinate [in eternity past], them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified [in eternity future]” (Rom 8:30).

5. The Certainty of Election

Before we approach what is the more experimental side of our subject, let us review the ground that we have already traversed. We have seen that the doctrine of election is one of the deep things of God and must be received with simple, unquestioning faith; that like the subject of the Holy Trinity, it is a profound mystery which transcends⁴¹ the grasp of the finite mind. Then we have sought to show by a free quotation from Scripture that the truth of election is clearly taught in the Word of God; nay more, that it is one of the most prominent truths of divine revelation. Further, we have seen that the principle of election runs through all God’s dealings with people; that, both in Old Testament and New Testament times, God passes by some and calls others. Next, we considered briefly the justice of election, and found that in blessing some, God showed no injustice to others, because none have any claim upon Him. And that as salvation is His free gift, He dispenses His favors according to His own good pleasure. Finally, we have noted the corollaries of this doctrine and shown how it ascribes all the glory to God, and

⁴¹ **transcends** – surpasses.

guarantees in the most emphatic way the eternal security of all who were chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world.

And now, with a humble desire to seek to remove some of the difficulties which naturally arise from a consideration of this subject, let us notice a few of the questions which usually occur to all reflecting minds when this doctrine is brought before them for the first time.

6. The Difficulties of Election

1. *Does not Scripture declare that God is no respecter of persons?*

Yes, it does (Act 10:34), and election proves it. The seven sons of Jesse, though older and physically superior to David, are passed by, while the young shepherd boy is exalted to Israel's throne. The scribes and lawyers are unnoticed, and ignorant fishermen are chosen to be apostles of the Lamb. Divine truth is hidden from "the wise and prudent," but is revealed unto "babes" (Mat 11:25). The majority of the mighty and noble are ignored, while the weak and despised are called and saved. Harlots and publicans are sweetly compelled to come to the marriage feast, while proud Pharisees are suffered to perish in their own self-righteousness. Truly, God is no respecter of persons, *or He would not have saved you*, my friend.

2. *But is not man a responsible being, endowed with a free will?*

Man is unquestionably a responsible being. He is no mere machine or automaton. Scripture uniformly regards him as one who reaps according as he sows, and as one who shall yet have to render an account for the things done in the body. But nowhere does the Bible predicate the free will of the natural man. Man by nature is the subject of Satan and the slave of sin, and does not become free until the Son of God makes him free (Joh 8:36). "No man can come to me [but he can if he is free], except the Father which hath sent me draw him" (Joh 6:44)—but there is no need to "draw" him if he is free. This is unequivocal.⁴²

"When mercy comes to bless, it finds us bent to curse. We will not receive the proffered⁴³ boon;⁴⁴ we reject the mercy, and grace must overcome our will. It must lead us captives in silken bonds, or likewise it cannot bless us. Man, while his will is free, is graceless; it is only when his will is bound by fetters of sovereign grace that he is gracious at all. If there be such a thing as free-will, Luther truly hit the mark when he called free-will a slave. It is only our will in bonds that is truly free. Our will constrained, then ranges at liberty; when grace binds it, then indeed it is free, and only then, when the Son has made it free." (C.H. Spurgeon, *The Glory of Grace*—Ephesians 1:6).

⁴² **unequivocal** –not doubtful; clear; evident.

⁴³ **proffered** – offered for acceptance.

⁴⁴ **boon** – a gift; a grant.

3. But does not Scripture say, Whosoever will, may come?

It does, and Christ never yet turned away any willing soul. If, in the eleventh hour, the dying thief who turned unto the Lord was assured a place in paradise, and if Saul the persecutor of the church—"the chief of sinners" (1Ti 1:15)—found mercy, verily, whosoever will, may come (Act 2:21; Rev 22:17). But all are not willing. The vast majority of people have no desire to come to Christ. Had God left it entirely to man's will, none would ever have accepted Him. Consequently, God has to work in us "both to will and to do of his good pleasure" (Phi 2:13). But God does not thus work in all, and that brings in election.

4. But why preach the Gospel to every creature if only a "few" are chosen?

Because the atoning sacrifice of Christ is sufficient for all, if all will accept it. Because God would have published⁴⁵ far and wide the matchless grace and fathomless love of His dear Son. Because the sacrifice of Christ is eminently adapted to all, what suits one sinner must meet the needs of another. Because it is by the preaching of the Gospel that the elect are called out from the world. Finally, because we are commanded to preach the Gospel to all nations, and "it's not for us to reason why; it's not for us to make reply; it's for us to do—and die."

5. But will not this doctrine cut the nerve of evangelistic effort?

Once again we will let Mr. Spurgeon make reply.

"Well, then, says one, that will make people sit still and fold their arms.' Sir, it will not. But if men did so, I could not help it; my business, as I have often said in this place before, is not to prove to you the reasonableness of any truth, nor to defend any truth from its consequences; all I do here—and I mean to keep to it—is just to assert the truth, because it is in the Bible. Then, if you do not like it, you must quarrel with my Master; and if you think it unreasonable, you must quarrel with the Bible. Let others defend Scripture and prove it to be true; they can do their work better than I could—mine is just the mere work of proclaiming it. I am the messenger; I tell the Master's message. If you do not like the message, quarrel with the Bible, not with me. So long as I have Scripture on my side, I will dare and defy you to do anything against me. 'Salvation is of the LORD' (Jon 2:9). The Lord has to apply it, to make the unwilling willing, to make the ungodly godly, and bring the vile rebel to the feet of Jesus, or else salvation will never be accomplished. Leave that one thing undone, and you have broken the link of the chain, the very link which was necessary to its integrity. Take away the fact that God begins the good work, and that He sends us what the old divines call preventing grace—take that away, and you have spoilt the whole of salvation. You have just taken the keystone out of the arch, and down it tumbles." (C.H. Spurgeon, *Salvation of the Lord*—Jonah 2:9).

⁴⁵ **would have published** – wills to have published.

7. The Signs of Election

How may believers know they are among the number of God's elect? It is true they do not have access to His Book of Life; that they cannot read His secret decrees; that they are ignorant of His eternal counsels. Yet it is possible for the saints to know they are among the ones whom God has predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son. There are at least five ways in which God testifies that He has chosen us from all eternity.

1. *By calling us to Himself*

"Whom he did predestinate, them he also called" (Rom 8:30). The predestination was in eternity; the calling is in time. This call comes to the elect with irresistible force: They hear it and they cannot but respond. "The sheep hear his voice: and he calleth his own sheep by name, and leadeth them out" (Joh 10:3). We have an illustration of this in the case of Zacchaeus. "Zacchaeus, make haste, and come down...And he made haste, and came down, and received him joyfully" (Luk 19:5-6). The sheep was called by name and responded to the Shepherd's voice! "And the sheep follow him: for they know his voice" (Joh 10:4). We have another beautiful illustration of this recorded in John 20:16: "Jesus saith unto her, Mary. She turned herself, and saith unto him, Rabboni." Previously she knew Him not; she mistook Him for the gardener; but the Good Shepherd addressed His own sheep by name—"Mary"—and instantly she knew His voice! Here, then, is the first mark of election, as illustrated by the above cases. The Shepherd calls, and those who are His sheep (the elect) hear, recognize, and respond.

2. *By creating them anew in Christ*

Or, in other words, by making them His children. All are not God's children. On the contrary, all are by nature "children of wrath" (Eph 2:3), and only by sovereign grace do we become children of God. All are His creatures, but all are not His sons. Regeneration is the consequence of election. "Of his own will begat he us" (Jam 1:18). "Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God" (Joh 1:13). Have I been born again? Have I been made a new creature in Christ? Are there unmistakable evidences in my life that I have been made a partaker of the divine nature? Then this is one of the marks of my election.

3. *By conforming them to His will*

"The carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be" (Rom 8:7). The unregenerate will is entirely opposed to everything truly holy. But it is otherwise with those whom God calls and quickens. He renews their wills. He works in them both to will and to do of His good pleasure. That which differentiates a child of the devil from a child of God, is that the former is ruled by his own will, while the will of the latter is lost in God's. The language of the saint is, "It is the LORD: let him do what seemeth him good" (1Sa 3:18). If then your will is broken, if you find yourself saying from the heart, "not my will, but thine, be done" (Luk 22:42), then this is one of the marks and signs of your election.

4. By communicating His love to their hearts

The wicked have no love for God, no capacity to appreciate His perfections, no concern for His glory. They see in Him no beauty that they should desire Him, yea, He is despised and rejected by them (Isa 53:2-3). But the Holy Spirit sheds abroad the love of God in the hearts of those who believe (Rom 5:5). To them, God is so excellent, they say, “Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire beside thee” (Psa 73:25). To them, Christ is the fairest among ten thousand, the “altogether lovely” One (Song 5:16). If then the love of God glows within your heart, this is one of the marks and evidences of your election.

5. By cultivating in them the fruit of the Spirit

In the Parable of the Sower, there are four kinds of ground on which the seed falls, but only one bears any fruit. The first three represent various classes of unbelievers who hear the Word of God, and one thing is common to them—they are all barren. But the fourth class, the good ground hearers, brings forth fruit in varying degrees. Here, then, is another unfailing sign, another peculiar characteristic of believers—they bring forth fruit. What that fruit is, we learn from Galatians 5:22-23. Have I “love”—love for God, for His Word, for His people? Have I “joy”—that deep, fixed, wondrous joy, which the world knows nothing of? Have I “peace”—that peace of conscience which comes from the knowledge of sins forgiven? Am I “long-suffering,” so that “I endure all things for the elect’s sakes” (2Ti 2:10)? Have I “gentleness,” so that like a real sheep I never show fight? Have I “goodness,” so that those around take knowledge that I have been with Jesus? Have I “faith,” so that I rest with unshaken confidence upon God’s promises? Have I “meekness,” so that I esteem others better than myself? Have I “temperance,” so that my moderation is known unto all men (Phi 4:5)? Then this is the fruit of the Spirit. By these and similar signs, God indicates to us our eternal election.

8. The Fruits of Election

Not only does God give us these infallible signs by which we may discover His choice, but the elect make their own election sure unto themselves. “Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure” (2Pe 1:10). In the mind of God, my calling and election were “sure” before the foundation of the world; but so far as my own consciousness and assurance of them are concerned, I am to give diligence to make them sure to myself. How do the elect do this?

1. By abandoning themselves to Christ

“All that the Father giveth me shall come to me (Joh 6:37). When we lose all confidence in the flesh; when we come entirely to the end of ourselves; when we realize that in the flesh there dwelleth no good thing; when we become conscious that all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags; when we are prepared to cry, “Lord save me, I perish” (see Mat 8:25); when we fly to Christ as the only refuge from the wrath to come—then we take the first step in making our calling and election sure.

2. By an obedient walk

Peter addresses the “strangers” as “elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience” (1Pe 1:2). If we are walking contrary to God’s precepts, then we have no reason to consider ourselves as being among God’s elect. The Good Shepherd leads His sheep in “the paths of righteousness” (Psa 23:3), and if we are found in “the way of sinners” (Psa 1:1), then we have no warrant for calling ourselves His sheep. But if we are praying for and striving daily after a more perfect obedience than that which we have yet rendered, then we are making our calling and election sure. “For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them” (Eph 2:10).

3. By a progressive sanctification

“Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord” (Heb 12:14). If we are growing in grace and in the knowledge of the Lord (2Pe 3:18); if we are forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before (Phi 3:13); if we are cleansing ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, and are perfecting holiness in the fear of God (2Co 7:1)—then are we making our own “calling and election sure.” “According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy” (Eph 1:4).

4. By a continued perseverance in the faith

Herein are false professors to be distinguished from God’s elect. There are those who hear the Word and anon with joy receive it, yet have they no root in themselves, but endure for a while only (Mat 13:20- 21). But God’s elect persevere unto the end. They “follow on to know the LORD” (Hos 6:3). They may oftentimes be cast down in themselves; they may sometimes be overtaken in a fault; they have to confess that they are “unprofitable servants” (Luk 17:10)—yet at the end, every one of them in measure will be able to say, “I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith” (2Ti 4:7). By enduring to the end, we make our calling and election sure unto ourselves. “Whom he did predestinate...them he also glorified” (Rom 8:30).

Brethren, if we are among God’s chosen ones, let us show by our daily walk that we are indeed the choicest of men. “Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering; Forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye” (Col 3:12-13). ❧

Available in print as a booklet from Chapel Library.

Present Day Evangelism

Most of the so-called evangelism of our day is a grief to genuine Christians, for they feel that it lacks any scriptural warrant, that it is dishonoring unto God, and that it is filling the churches with empty professors. They are shocked that so much frothy superficiality, fleshly excitement and worldly allurements should be associated with the holy name of the Lord Jesus Christ. They deplore the cheapening of the Gospel, the beguiling of unwary souls, and the carnalizing and commercializing of what is to them ineffably⁴⁶ sacred. It requires little spiritual discernment to perceive that the evangelistic activities of Christendom during the last century have steadily deteriorated from bad to worse, yet few appear to realize the root from which this evil has sprung. It will now be our endeavor to expose the same. Its aim was wrong, and therefore its fruit faulty.

1. The Grand Design of God

The grand design of God, from which He never has and never will swerve, is to glorify Himself—to make manifest before His creatures what an infinitely glorious Being He is. That is the great aim and end He has in all that He does and says. For that He suffered sin to enter the world. For that He willed His beloved Son to become incarnate, render perfect obedience to the divine law, suffer and die. For that He is now taking out of the world a people for Himself, a people which shall eternally show forth His praises. For that everything is ordered by His providential dealings. Unto that everything on earth is now being directed, and shall actually affect the same. Nothing other than that is what regulates God in all His actings: “For of him, and through him, and to him are all things: to whom be glory for ever. Amen” (Rom 11:36).

That grand and basic truth is written right across the Scriptures with the plainness of a sunbeam, and he who sees it not is blind. All things are appointed by God to that one end. His saving of sinners is not an end in itself, for God would have been no loser had every one of them eternally perished. No, His saving of sinners is but a means unto an end—“to the praise of the glory of his grace” (Eph 1:6). Now from that fundamental fact, it necessarily follows that we should make the same our aim and end: that God may be magnified by us—“Whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God” (1Co 10:31). In like manner, it also follows that such must be the preacher’s aim, and that everything must be subordinated thereto, for everything else is of secondary importance and value. But, is it so? Take the latest slogan of the religious world, “Youth for Christ.” Well, what is wrong with that? Its emphasis! Why not “Christ for Youth?”

If the evangelist fails to make the glory of God his paramount and constant aim, he is certain to go wrong, and all his efforts will be more or less a beating of the air. When he

⁴⁶ **ineffably** – inexpressibly.

makes an end of anything less than that, he is sure to fall into error, for he no longer gives God His proper place. Once we fix on *ends* of our own, we are ready to adopt *means* of our own. It was at this very point evangelism failed two or three generations ago, and from that point it has farther and farther departed. Evangelism made “the winning of souls” its goal, its *summum bonum*,⁴⁷ and everything else was made to serve and pay tribute to the same. Though the glory of God was not actually denied, yet it was lost sight of, crowded out, and made secondary. Further, let it be remembered that God is honored in exact proportion as the preacher cleaves to His Word, and faithfully proclaims all His counsel, and not merely those portions which appeal to him.

To say nothing here about those cheap-jack evangelists who aim no higher than rushing people into making a formal profession of faith in order that the membership of the churches may be swelled. Take those who are inspired by a genuine compassion and deep concern for the perishing, who earnestly long and zealously endeavor to deliver souls from the wrath to come: unless they be much on their guard, they too will inevitably err. Unless they steadily view conversion in the way God does—as the way in which He is to be glorified—they will quickly begin to compromise in the means they employ. The feverish urge of modern evangelism is not how to promote the glory of the triune Jehovah, but how to multiply conversions. The whole current of evangelical activity during the past fifty years has taken that direction. Losing sight of God’s end, the churches have devised means of their own.

Bent on attaining a certain desired object, the energy of the flesh has been given free rein; and supposing that the object was right, evangelists have concluded that nothing could be wrong which contributed unto the securing of that end; and since their efforts appear to be eminently successful, only too many churches silently acquiesced, telling themselves “the end justified the means.” Instead of examining the plans proposed and the methods adopted by the light of Scripture, they were tacitly⁴⁸ accepted on the ground of expediency. The evangelist was esteemed not for the soundness of his message, but by the visible “results” he secured. He was valued, not according to how far his preaching honored God, but by how many souls were supposedly converted under it.

2. Mistaken Design of Modern Evangelism

Once a man makes the conversion of sinners his prime design and all-consuming end, he is exceedingly apt to adopt a wrong course. Instead of striving to preach the truth in all its purity, he will tone it down so as to make it more palatable to the unregenerate. Impelled by a single force, moving in one fixed direction, his object is to make conversion easy, and therefore favorite passages (like John 3:16) are dwelt upon incessantly, while others are ignored or pared away. It inevitably reacts upon his own theology, and various verses in the Word are shunned, if not repudiated. What place will he

⁴⁷ *summum bonum* – the highest or greatest good.

⁴⁸ *tacitly* – not expressing or declaring openly.

give in his thought to such declarations as: “Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots?” (Jer 13:23); “No man can come unto me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him” (Joh 6:44); “Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you” (Joh 15:14)?

He will be sorely tempted to modify the truth of God’s sovereign election, of Christ’s particular redemption, of the imperative necessity for the supernatural operations of the Holy Spirit.

In twentieth-century evangelism, there has been a woeful ignoring of the solemn truth of the total depravity of man. There has been a complete underrating of the desperate case and condition of the sinner. Very few indeed have faced the unpalatable fact that every man is thoroughly corrupt by nature, that he is completely unaware of his own wretchedness, blind and helpless, dead in trespasses and sins. Because such is his case, because his heart is filled with enmity against God, it follows that no man can be saved without the special and immediate intervention of God. According to our view here, so will it be elsewhere. To qualify and modify the truth of man’s total depravity will inevitably lead to the diluting of collateral⁴⁹ truths. The teaching of Holy Writ on this point is unmistakable: man’s plight is such that his salvation is impossible unless God puts forth His mighty power. No stirring of the emotions by anecdotes, no regaling of the senses by music, no oratory of the preacher, no persuasive appeals, are of the slightest avail.

In connection with the old creation, God did all without any assistants. But in the far more stupendous work of the new creation, it is intimated by the Arminian evangelism of our day that He needs the sinner’s co-operation. Really, it comes to this—God is represented as helping man to save himself: the sinner must begin the work by becoming willing, and then God will complete the business. Whereas, none but the Spirit can make him willing in the day of His power (Psa 110:3). He alone can produce godly sorrow for sin, and saving faith in the Gospel. He alone can make us not love ourselves first and foremost, and bring us into subjection to the lordship of Christ. Instead of seeking the aid of outside evangelists, let the churches get on their faces before God, confess their sins, seek His glory, and cry for His miracle-working operations. “Not by might (of the preacher), nor by power (of the sinner’s will), but by my spirit, saith the Lord” (Zec 4:6).

It is generally recognized that spirituality is at a low ebb in Christendom, and not a few perceive that sound doctrine is rapidly on the wane, yet many of the Lord’s people take comfort from supposing that the Gospel is still being widely preached and that large numbers are being saved thereby. Alas, their optimistic supposition is ill-founded and sandily grounded. If the “message” now being delivered in mission halls be examined, if the “tracts” which are being scattered among the unchurched masses be scrutinized, if the open air speakers be carefully listened to, if the sermons or addresses of a “soul-winning campaign” be analyzed; in short, if modern “evangelism” be weighed in the bal-

⁴⁹ **collateral** – side by side; corresponding.

ances of Holy Writ, it will be found wanting, lacking that which is vital to genuine conversion, lacking what is essential if sinners are to be shown their need of a Savior, lacking that which will produce the transfigured lives of new creatures in Christ Jesus.

It is in no captious⁵⁰ spirit that we write, seeking to make a man an offender for a word. It is not that we are looking for perfection, and complain because we cannot find it; nor that we criticize others because they are not doing things as we think they should be done. No, it is a matter far more serious than that. The “evangelism” of the day is not only superficial to the last degree, but it is radically defective. It is utterly lacking a foundation on which to base an appeal for sinners to come to Christ. There is not only a lamentable lack of proportion (the mercy of God being made far more prominent than His holiness, His love than His wrath), but there is a fatal omission of that which God has given for the purpose of imparting a knowledge of sin. There is not only a reprehensible introducing of “bright singing,” humorous witticisms and entertaining anecdotes, but there is a studied omission of dark background upon which alone the Gospel can effectively shine forth.

But serious indeed as is the above indictment, it is only half of it—the negative side, that which is lacking. Worse still is that which is being retailed by the cheap-jack evangelists of the day. The positive content of their message is nothing but a throwing of dust in the eyes of the sinner. His soul is put to sleep by the devil’s opiate, ministered in a most unsuspecting form. Those who really receive the “message” which is now being given out from most of the “orthodox” pulpits and platforms today are being fatally deceived. It is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but unless God sovereignly intervenes by a miracle of grace, all who follow it will surely find that the ends thereof are the ways of death. Tens of thousands who confidently imagine that they are bound for heaven will get a terrible disillusionment when they awake in hell!

3. The True Gospel

Is the Gospel a message of glad tidings from heaven to make God-defying rebels at ease in their wickedness? Is it given for the purpose of assuring the pleasure-crazy young people that, providing they only “believe,” there is nothing for them to fear in the future? One would certainly think so from the way in which the Gospel is presented, or rather perverted, by most of the “evangelists,” and the more so when we look at the lives of their “converts.” Surely those with any degree of spiritual discernment must perceive that to assure such that God loves them and His Son died for them, and that a full pardon for all their sins (past, present and future) can be obtained by simply “accepting Christ as their personal Savior” is but a casting of pearls before swine.

The gospel is not a thing apart. It is not something independent of the prior revelation of God’s Law. It is not an announcement that God has relaxed His justice or lowered His standard of holiness. So far from that, when scripturally expounded, the Gospel pre-

⁵⁰ **captious** – made only for the sake of argument or faultfinding.

sents the clearest demonstration and the climacteric⁵¹ proof of the inexorableness⁵² of God's justice and of His infinite abhorrence of sin. But for scripturally expounding the Gospel, beardless youths and business men who devote their spare time to "evangelistic effort" are quite unqualified. Alas, that the pride of the flesh suffers so many incompetent ones to rush in where those much wiser fear to tread. It is this multiplying of novices that is largely responsible for the woeful situation now confronting us, and because the churches and assemblies are so largely filled with their "converts" explains why they are so unspiritual and worldly.

No, my reader, the Gospel is very, very far from making light of sin. The Gospel shows us how unsparingly God deals with sin. It reveals to us the terrible sword of His justice smiting His beloved Son in order that atonement might be made for the transgressions of His people. So far from the Gospel setting aside the law, it exhibits the Savior enduring the curse of it. Calvary supplied the most solemn and awe-inspiring display of God's hatred of sin that time or eternity will ever furnish. And do you imagine that the Gospel is magnified or God glorified by going to worldlings and telling them that they "may be saved at this moment by simply accepting Christ as their personal Savior" while they are wedded to their idols and their hearts are still in love with sin? If I do so, I tell them a lie, pervert the Gospel, insult Christ, and turn the grace of God into lasciviousness.

No doubt some readers are ready to object to our "harsh" and "sarcastic" statements above by asking: When the question was put, "What must I do to be saved?" (Act 16:31), did not an inspired apostle expressly say, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved"? Can we err, then, if we tell sinners the same thing today? Have we not divine warrant for so doing? True, those words are found in Holy Writ, and because they are, many superficial and untrained people conclude that they are justified in repeating them to all and sundry. But let it be pointed out that Acts 16:31 was not addressed to a promiscuous⁵³ multitude, but to a particular individual, which at once intimates that it is not a message to be indiscriminately sounded forth, but rather, a special word to those whose characters correspond to the one to whom it was first spoken.

Verses of scripture must not be wrenched from their setting, but weighed, interpreted, and applied in accord with their context; and that calls for prayerful consideration, careful meditation, and prolonged study; and it is failure at this point which accounts for these shoddy and worthless "messages" of this rush-ahead age. Look at the context of Acts 16:31, and what do we find? What was the occasion, and to whom was it that the apostle and his companion said, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ?" A sevenfold answer is there furnished, which supplies a striking and complete delineation⁵⁴ of the character

⁵¹ **climacteric** – crucial.

⁵² **inexorableness** – relentlessness.

⁵³ **promiscuous** – of different sorts mixed or mingled.

⁵⁴ **delineation** – sketching out.

of those to whom we are warranted in giving this truly evangelistic word. As we briefly name these seven details, let the reader carefully ponder them.

First, the man to whom these words were spoken had just witnessed the miracle-working power of God. “And suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken: and immediately all the doors were opened, and every one’s bands were loosed” (Act 16:26). Second, in consequence thereof the man was deeply stirred, even to the point of self-despair: “He drew out his sword and would have killed himself, supposing that the prisoners had been fled” (v.27). Third, he felt the need of illumination: “Then he called for a light” (v.29). Fourth, his self-complacency was utterly shattered, for he “came trembling” (v.29). Fifth, he took his proper place before God—in the dust—for “he fell down before Paul and Silas” (v. 29). Sixth, he showed respect and consideration for God’s servants, for he “brought them out” (v. 30). Seventh, then, with a deep concern for his soul, he asked, “What must I do to be saved?”

Here then, is something definite for our guidance, if we are willing to be guided. It was no giddy, careless, unconcerned person who was exhorted to “simply” believe; but instead, one who gave clear evidence that a mighty work of God had already been wrought within him. He was an awakened soul (v.27). In his case there was no need to press upon him his lost condition, for he obviously felt it; nor were the apostles required to urge upon him the duty of repentance, for his entire demeanor betokened⁵⁵ his contrition. But to apply the words spoken to him unto those who are totally blind to their depraved state and completely dead toward God, would be more foolish than placing a bottle of smelling salts to the nose of one just dragged unconscious from the water. Let the critic of this article read through Acts and see if he can find a single instance of the apostles addressing a promiscuous audience or a company of idolatrous heathen and simply telling them to believe in Christ!

4. The Nature of Salvation

Just as the world was not ready for the New Testament before it received the Old, just as the Jews were not prepared for the ministry of Christ until John the Baptist had gone before Him with his clamant⁵⁶ call to repentance, so the unsaved are in no condition today for the Gospel till the law be applied to their hearts, for “by the law is the knowledge of sin” (Rom 3:20). It is a waste of time to sow seed on ground which has never been ploughed or spaded! To present the vicarious⁵⁷ sacrifice of Christ to those whose dominant passion is to take their fill of sin, is to give that which is holy unto the dogs. What the unconverted need to hear about is the character of Him with whom they have to do, His claims upon them, His righteous demands, and the infinite enormity of disregarding Him and going their own way!

⁵⁵ **betokened** – indicated.

⁵⁶ **clamant** – demanding attention; urgent.

⁵⁷ **vicarious** – substitutionary.

The nature of Christ's salvation is woefully misrepresented by the present-day "evangelist." He announces a Savior from hell rather than a Savior from sin. And that is why so many are fatally deceived, for there are multitudes who wish to escape the lake of fire, who have no desire to be delivered from their carnality and worldliness. The very first thing said of Him in the New Testament is—"Thou shalt call his name Jesus: for he shall save his people (not "from the wrath to come," but) from their sins" (Mat 1:21). Christ is a Savior for those realizing something of the exceeding sinfulness of sin, who feel the awful burden of it on their conscience, who loathe themselves for it, who long to be freed from its terrible dominion. And He is a Savior for no others. Were He to "save from hell" those still in love with sin, He would be a minister of sin, condoning their wickedness and siding with them against God. What an unspeakably horrible and blasphemous thing with which to charge the Holy One!

Should the reader exclaim, "I was not conscious of the heinousness⁵⁸ of sin nor bowed down with a sense of my guilt when Christ saved me." Then we unhesitating reply—either you have never been saved at all, or you were not saved as early as you supposed. True, as the Christian grows in grace, he has a clearer realization of what sin is—rebellion against God—and a deeper hatred of and sorrow for it. But to think that one may be saved by Christ whose conscience has never been smitten by the Spirit and whose heart has not been made contrite before God, is to imagine something which has no existence in the realm of fact. "They that be whole need not a physician, but they that are sick" (Mat 9:12). The only ones who really seek relief from the great Physician are they that are sick of sin—who long to be delivered from its God-dishonoring works and its soul-defiling pollutions.

Inasmuch then, as Christ's salvation is a salvation from sin—from the love of it, from its dominion, from its guilt and penalty—then it necessarily follows that the first great task and the chief work of the evangelist is to preach upon SIN: to define what sin (as distinct from crime) really is. He must show wherein its infinite enormity consists, to trace out its manifold workings in the heart, to indicate that nothing less than eternal punishment is its desert. Ah, and preaching upon sin—not merely uttering a few platitudes concerning it, but devoting sermon after sermon to explaining what sin is in the sight of God—will not make him popular nor draw the crowds, will it? No, it will not, and knowing this, those who love the praise of men more than the approbation⁵⁹ of God, and who value their salary above immortal souls, trim their sails accordingly. "But such preaching will drive the people away!" We answer, far better drive the people away by faithful preaching, than to drive the Holy Spirit away by unfaithfully pandering⁶⁰ to the flesh!

⁵⁸ **heinousness** – outrageous evil or wickedness.

⁵⁹ **approbation** – approval; sanction.

⁶⁰ **pandering** – providing the means to satisfy unrighteous desires.

The terms of Christ's salvation are erroneously stated by the present-day evangelist. With very rare exceptions he tells his hearers that salvation is by grace and is received as a free gift, that Christ has done everything for the sinner, and that nothing remains but for him to "believe," to trust in the infinite merits of His blood. And so widely does this conception now prevail in "orthodox" circles, so frequently has it been dinned in their ears, so deeply has it taken root in their minds, that it has become dangerous for one to now challenge it. For one to denounce it as being so inadequate and one-sided as to be deceptive and erroneous, is for him to instantly court the stigma of being a heretic. He may be charged with dishonoring the finished work of Christ by inculcating⁶¹ salvation by works. Yet, notwithstanding, the writer is quite prepared to run that risk.

Salvation is by grace, by grace alone, for a fallen creature cannot possibly do anything to merit God's approval or earn His favor. Nevertheless, divine grace is not exercised at the expense of holiness, for it never compromises with sin. It is also true that salvation is a free gift, but an empty hand must receive it, and not a hand which still tightly grasps the world! But it is not true that "Christ has done everything for the sinner." He did not fill His belly with the husks which the swine eat and find them unable to satisfy. He has not turned His back on the far country, arisen, gone to the Father, and acknowledged his sins—those are acts which the sinner himself must perform. True, he will not be saved for the performance of them, any more than the prodigal could receive the Father's kiss and ring while he remained at a guilty distance from him!

Something more than "believing" is necessary to salvation. A heart that is steeled in rebellion against God cannot savingly believe—it must first be broken. It is written: "Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish" (Luk 13:3). Repentance is just as essential as faith, yea, the latter cannot be without the former: "Ye...repented not afterward, that ye might believe" (Mat 21:32). The order is clearly enough laid down by Christ: "Repent ye, and believe the gospel" (Mar 1:15). Repentance is a heart-repudiation of sin. Repentance is a heart-determination to forsake sin. And where there is true repentance, grace is free to act, for the requirements of holiness are conserved when sin is renounced. Thus, it is the duty of the evangelist to cry, "Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts, and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy on him" (Isa 55:7). His task is to call on his hearers to lay down the weapons of their warfare against God, and then to sue for mercy through Christ.

The way of salvation is falsely defined. In most instances the modern "evangelist" assures his congregation that all any sinner has to do in order to escape hell and make sure of heaven is to "receive Christ as his personal Savior." But such teaching is utterly misleading. No one can receive Christ as his Savior while he rejects Him as Lord! It is true, the preacher adds, that the one who accepts Christ should also surrender to Him as Lord, but he at once spoils it by asserting that though the convert fails to do so, nevertheless heaven is sure to him. That is one of the devil's lies! Only those who are spiritual-

⁶¹ **inculcating** – impressing upon the mind with frequent repetition.

ly blind would declare that Christ will save any who despise His authority and refuse His yoke. Why, my reader, that would not be grace, but a disgrace charging Christ with placing a premium on lawlessness!

It is in His office of Lord that Christ maintains God's honor, subserves⁶² His government, enforces His Law; and if the reader will turn to those passages (Luk 1:46-47; Act 5:31; 2Pe 1:11; 2:20; 3:1) where the two titles occur, he will find that the order is always "Lord and Savior," and not "Savior and Lord." Therefore, those who have not bowed to Christ's sceptre and enthroned Him in their hearts and lives, and yet imagine they are trusting in Him as their Savior, are deceived, and unless God disillusion them, they will go down to the everlasting burnings with a lie in their right hand (Isa 44:20). Christ is "the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him" (Heb 5:9), but the attitude of those who submit not to His Lordship is—"We will not have this man to rule over us" (Luk 19:14). Pause then, my reader, and honestly face the question: Am I subject to His will? Am I sincerely endeavoring to keep His commandments?

5. What Must We Do?

Alas, alas, God's way of salvation is almost entirely unknown today, the nature of Christ's salvation is almost universally misunderstood, and the terms of His salvation misrepresented on every hand. The "gospel" which is now being proclaimed is, in nine cases out of every ten, but a perversion of the truth, and tens of thousands, assured they are bound for heaven, are now hastening to hell as fast as time can take them. Things are far, far worse in Christendom than even the pessimist and the alarmist suppose. We are not a prophet, nor shall we indulge in any speculation of what the Biblical prophecy forecasts. Wiser men than the writer have often made fools of themselves by so doing. We are frank to say that we know not what God is about to do. Religious conditions were much worse, even in England, one hundred and fifty years ago. But this we greatly fear: unless God is pleased to grant a real revival, it will not be long ere "the darkness shall cover the earth, and gross darkness the people" (Isa 60:2), for the light of the true Gospel is rapidly disappearing. Modern "evangelism" constitutes, in our judgment, the most solemn of all the "signs of the times."

What must the people of God do in view of the existing situation? Ephesians 5:11 supplies the divine answer: "Have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them;" and everything opposed to the light of the Word is "darkness." It is the bounden duty of every Christian to have no dealings with the "evangelistic" monstrosity of the day, to withhold all moral and financial support of the same, to attend none of their meetings, to circulate none of their tracts. Those preachers who tell sinners that they may be saved without forsaking their idols, without repenting, without surrendering to the Lordship of Christ, are as erroneous and dangerous as others who insist that salvation is by works, and that heaven must be earned by our own efforts. ❧

⁶² **subserves** – serves; promotes; aids.

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Sanctification

The Holy Spirit Leading

“For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God.”—Romans 8:14

This verse presents to us another aspect of the varied work of the blessed Holy Spirit. In addition to all His other functions, He performs the office of Guide unto the godly. Nor is this peculiar to the present dispensation: He so ministered during the Old Testament times. This is brought out clearly in Isaiah 63,

“Where is he that brought them up out of the sea with the shepherd of his flock? where is he that put his holy Spirit within him? That led them by the right hand of Moses with his glorious arm, dividing the water before them, to make himself an everlasting name? That led them through the deep, as an horse in the wilderness, that they should not stumble? As a beast goeth down into the valley, the Spirit of the LORD caused him to rest: so didst thou lead thy people, to make thyself a glorious name” (Isa 63:11-14).

Moses was no more able, by his own power, to induce the Hebrews to pass between the divided waters of the Red Sea and to cross the trackless desert, than by the mere extending of the rod he could divide those waters. Moses was simply the human instrument: the Holy Spirit was the efficient Agent.

Divinely Drawn

In the above passage we have more than a hint of how the Holy Spirit “leads”: it is by means of an inward impulse, as well as by external directions. Among his comments upon Romans 8:14 Matthew Henry says, “Led by the Spirit as a scholar in his learning is led by his tutor, as a traveler in his journey is led by his guide, as a soldier in his engagements is led by his captain.” But such analogies are inadequate, for they present only the external side, leaving out of account the internal operations of the Spirit, which are even

more essential. "O LORD, I know that the way of man is not in himself: it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps" (Jer 10:23). By nature we are not only ignorant of God's way, but reluctant to walk therein even when it is shown us, and therefore we find the Church praying "Draw me, we will run after thee" (Song 1:4). Ah, we never seek unto God, still less "run after Him," till we are divinely drawn.

This humbling truth was well understood by David of old. First, he prayed, "Teach me, O LORD, the way of thy statutes...Give me under-standing" (Psa 119:33-34). But second, he realized that something more than divine illumination was needed by him: therefore did he add, "Make me to go in the path of thy commandments...Incline my heart unto thy testimonies," (vv. 35-36). By nature our hearts are averse from God and holiness. We can be worldly of ourselves, but we cannot be heavenly of ourselves. The power of sin lies in the love of it, and it is only as our affections are divinely drawn unto things above that we are delivered from sin's dominion. Moreover, our wills are perverse, and only as supernatural grace is brought to bear upon them are they "inclined" Godwards. Thus, to be "led by the Spirit of God" is to be governed by Him from within, to be subject unto His secret but real impulses or strivings.

Not only are our hearts inclined by nature unto temporal, material, worldly, and evil things, rather than unto eternal, spiritual, heavenly and holy things, but they are by inveterate custom too. As soon as we are born we follow the bent of our natural appetites, and the first few years of our life are governed merely by sense; and the pleasures begotten by gratifying our senses become deeply ingrained in us. Moreover, by constant living in the world and long contact with material things, the tendency increases upon us and we become more strongly settled in a worldly frame. "Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots? then may ye also do good, that are accustomed to do evil" (Jer 13:23). Custom becomes a "second nature" to us: the more we follow a certain course of life, the more we delight in it, and we are only weaned from it with very great difficulty.

Natural lusts and appetites being born and bred in us from infancy, continue to cry out for indulgence and satisfaction. The will has become bent to a carnal course and the heart craves material pleasures. Hence, when the claims of God are presented to us, when the interests of our souls and the things of eternity are brought before us, when the "beauty of holiness" is presented to our view, they find our wills already biased in the contrary direction and our heart prepossessed with other inclinations, which by reason of long indulgence bind us to them. The heart being deeply engaged with and delighting in temporal and worldly things, is quite unable to respond to the dictates of reason and set itself upon that which is heavenly and divine; and even the voice of conscience is unheeded by the soul, which prefers the insidious lullaby of Satan. Nothing but the Almighty power of the Holy Spirit can turn ("lead") the heart in a contrary direction.

Now the heart is inclined toward God when the habitual bent of our affections is more to holiness than to worldly things. As the power of sin lies in the love of it, so it is with indwelling grace. Grace prevails over us when we so love the things of God that the bent of the will and the strength of our affections is carried after them. When the course

of our desires and endeavors, and the strength and stream of our souls runs out after holiness, then the heart is “inclined” Godwards. And how is this brought to pass, how does God reduce our rebellious hearts and mold them to the obedience of His will? The answer is, by His Word and by His Spirit; or putting it another way, by moral persuasion and by gracious power.

“And I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes” (Eze 36:27). God does this by combining together invincible might and gentle inducements. God works upon us morally, not physically, because He will preserve our nature and the principles thereof. He does not force us against our wills, but sweetly draws us. He presents weighty reasons, casting into the mind one after another, till the scales be turned and then all is made efficacious by His Spirit. Yet this is not a work which He does in the soul once and for all, but is often renewed and repeated; and that because the “flesh” or sinful nature remains in us, unchanged, even after regeneration. Therefore do we need to ask God to continue inclining our hearts toward Himself.

This brings us to notice the intimate connection which exists between our present text and the verse immediately preceding it. “For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die: but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live” (Rom 8:13):—if we yield ourselves to the Spirit’s impulses to restrain our evil propensities and our proneness to indulge them, then heaven will be our portion, “For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God” (v. 14). Thus Romans 8:14 is said in confirmation and amplification of verse 13: only those who are ruled by the Spirit give evidence that they are the “sons of God.” To be “led by the Spirit,” then, means, as the whole context clearly shows, to “walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit” (v. 4), to “mind the things of the Spirit” (v. 5), to “through the Spirit mortify the deeds of the body” (v. 13). Suitably did Calvin remark on Romans 8:14, “Thus the empty boasting of hypocrites is taken away, who without any reason assume the title of sons of God.”

Thus we are “led by the Spirit” both actively and passively: actively, with respect to His prompting; passively on our part, as we submit to those promptings; actively, by His pressing upon us the holy requirements of the Scriptures; passively, as we yield ourselves unto those requirements. The Spirit is our Guide, but we must obey His motions. In the immediate context it is His restraining motives which are in view, moving us to the mortifying of sin. But His “leading” is not to be restricted to that: He exercises inviting motives, encouraging us unto the perfecting of holiness. And this being guided and governed by the Holy Spirit is an infallible proof that we are living members of God’s family.

Active Guidance

It is the office of Jehovah the Spirit in the covenant of redemption, after He has called the elect out of the world, to place Himself at their head and undertake their future guidance. He knows the only path which leads to heaven. He knows the difficulties and dangers which beset us, the intricate maze of life’s journey, the numerous false

routes by which Satan deceives souls, and the proneness of the human heart to follow that which is evil; and therefore does He, in His infinite grace, take charge of those who are “strangers and pilgrims” in this scene, and conduct them safely to the Celestial Country. O what praise is due unto this heavenly Guide! How gladly and thankfully should we submit ourselves unto His directions! How hopeless would be our case without Him! With what alacrity should we follow His motions and directions!

As we have already pointed out, the blessed Spirit of God “leads” both objectively and subjectively: by pointing us to the directive precepts of the Word, that our actions may be regulated thereby: and by secret impulses from within the soul, impressing upon us the course we should follow—the evils to be avoided, the duties to be performed. The Spirit acts upon His own life in the renewed soul. He works in the Christian a right disposition of heart relating to Truth and duty. He maintains in the believer a right disposition of mind, preparing and disposing him to attend unto the revealed will of God. He speaks effectually to the conscience, enlightens the understanding, regulates the desires, and orders the conduct of those who submit themselves unto His holy suggestions and overtures. To be “led by the Spirit of God” is to be under His guidance and government.

A Caution

The wayward child and the self-willed youth is guided by his own unsanctified and unsubdued spirit. The man of the world is controlled by “the spirit of the world.” The wicked are governed by Satan “the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience” (Eph 2:2). But the Christian is to yield himself unto “the still small voice” of the Holy Spirit. Yet a word of caution is needed at this point, for in our day there are many fanatics and impious people who do that which is grossly dishonoring to God under the plea that they were “prompted by the Spirit” so to act. To be “led by the Spirit of God” does not mean being influenced by unaccountable suggestions and uncontrollable impulses which result in conduct displeasing to God, and often injurious to ourselves and others. No, indeed: not so does the Spirit of God “lead” anyone.

There is a safe and sure criterion by which the Christian may gauge his inward impulses, and ascertain whether they proceed from his own restless spirit, an evil spirit, or the Spirit of God. That criterion is the written Word of God, and by it all must be measured. The Holy Spirit never prompts anyone to act contrary to the Scriptures. How could He, when He is the Author of them! His promptings are always unto obedience to the precepts of Holy Writ. Therefore, when a man who has not been distinctly called, separated, and qualified by God to be a minister of His Word, undertakes to “preach,” no matter how strong the impulse, it proceeds not from the Holy Spirit. When a woman “feels led” to pray in public where men are present, she is moved by “another spirit” (2Co 11:4), or if one claimed “guidance” in assuming an unequal yoke by marrying an unbeliever, 2 Corinthians 6:14 would prove conclusively that it was not the “guidance” of the Holy Spirit.

Divine Direction

The Holy Spirit fulfills His office of Guide by three distinct operations. *First*, He communicates life and grace, a new “nature”; *second*, He stirs that life unto action, and gives “more grace”; *third*, He directs the action into performance of duty.

Life, motion, and conduct are inseparable in nature and grace alike. *First*, the Holy Spirit quickens us into newness of life, infusing gracious habits into the soul. “A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you” (Eze 36:26). *Second*, He moves upon the soul and assists the new nature to act according to its own gracious habits and principles: He “worketh in you both to will and to do of His good pleasure” (Phi 2:13). *Third*, He directs our actions by enlightening our understandings, guiding our inclinations, and moving our wills to do that which is pleasing unto God. It is the last two we are now considering.

Divine direction is promised the saints: “The meek will He guide in judgment: and the meek will He teach His way” (Psa 25:9): and this not only by general directions, but by particular excitations. “I am the LORD thy God which teacheth thee to profit, which leadeth thee by the way that thou shouldest go” (Isa 48:17). Divine guidance is desired by the saints as a great and necessary blessing: “Show me thy ways, O LORD; teach me thy paths. Lead me in thy truth, and teach me: for thou art the God of my salvation; on thee do I wait all the day” (Psa 25:4-5). Mark the earnestness of this prayer: “show me, teach me, lead me.” Note the argument: “Thou art the God of my salvation,” and as such, pledged to undertake for me. Observe the importunity: “on thee do I wait all the day,” as if he would not be left for a moment to his own poor wisdom and power. Even the “new nature” is utterly dependent upon the Holy Spirit.

Though the children of God are “light in the Lord” (Eph 5:8) and have a general understanding of the way of godliness, yet much ignorance and darkness still remains in them, and therefore in order to a steady and constant course of obedience they need to be guided by the Holy Spirit, so that their light may be both directive and persuasive. Though Christians have a general understanding of their duty, much grace from God is needed to perform it by them. If left to themselves, their own corruptions would blind and govern them, and therefore do they pray, “Order my steps in thy Word: and let not any iniquity have dominion over me” (Psa 119:133). The way to heaven is a “narrow” one, hard to find and harder still to be kept, except God teach us daily by His Spirit. Wisdom from on High is continually needed to know how to apply the rules of Scripture to all the varied details of our lives. The Holy Spirit is the only fountain of holiness, and to Him we must constantly turn for directions.

But something more than knowledge is needed by us: the Spirit must persuade and incline our hearts, and move our wills. How strong are our inclinations to sin, how easily fleshly impulses override our better judgment, how weak we are before temptation! We know what we should do, but are carried away by corrupt affections to the contrary. It is at this point the Holy Spirit governs from within. First, by His restraining motions, bidding us to avoid and mortify sin; second, by His quickening motions, inviting us to

the pursuit of holiness. And just so far as we yield to His “strivings” are we “led by the Spirit of God.” As moral agents we are responsible to co-operate with the Spirit and respond to His gentle sway over us. Alas, we so often fail to do so. But though He allows this up to a certain point—for our humbling—yet by His invincible power He prevents our making shipwreck of the faith, and after many chastenings, conducts us safely to Glory.

Knowing We Are Led by the Spirit

In conclusion we will seek to supply answer to the following question: How may Christians know whether they be among those who are “led by the Spirit of God”? In general, those who are directed by this divine Guide are moved to examine their hearts and take frequent notice of their ways, to mourn over their carnality and perverseness, to confess their sins, to earnestly seek grace to enable them to be obedient. They are moved to search the Scriptures daily to ascertain the things which God has prohibited and the things which He enjoins. They are moved to an increasing conformity to God’s holy Law, and an increasing enablement to meet its requirements is wrought in them by the Spirit blessing to them the means of grace.

But to be more specific. *First*, just so far as we are governed by the Spirit of God are we led from ourselves: from confidence in our own wisdom, from dependence up-on our own strength, and from trust in our own righteousness. We are led from self-aggrandizement, self-will, self-pleasing. The Spirit conducts away from self unto God. Yet let it be pointed out that this weaning us from ourselves is not accomplished in a moment, but is a perpetual and progressive thing. Alas, God has at best but a portion of our affections. It is true there are moments when we sincerely and ardently desire to be fully and unreservedly surrendered to Him, but the ensnaring power of some rival object soon confirms how partial and imperfect our surrender has been.

Second, just so far as we are governed by the Spirit of God are we brought to occupation with Christ. To whom else, in our deep need, can we go? Who so well-suited to our misery and poverty? Having severed us in some degree from ourselves, the Spirit brings us into a closer realization of our union with the Savior. Are we conscious of our filth and guilt?—the Spirit leads us to the blood of Christ. Are we sorely tried and oppressed?—the Spirit leads us to Him who is able to succour the tempted. Are we mourning our emptiness and barrenness?—the Spirit leads us to the One in whom dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily. It is the special office of the Spirit to take of the things of Christ and show them unto us.

Third, just so far as we are governed by the Spirit of God are we conducted along the highway of holiness. The Spirit leads the Christian away from the vanities of the world to the satisfying delight which is to be found in the Lord. He turns us from the husks which the swine feed upon unto spiritual realities, drawing our affections unto things above. He moves us to seek after more intimate and more constant communion with God, which can only be obtained by separation from that which He abhors. His aim is to

conform us more and more to the image of Christ. Finally, He will conduct us to heaven, for of it the Spirit is both the pledge and the earnest. ✠

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The Christian in Romans 7

In Romans chapter 7, the apostle does two things: *first*, he shows what is not and what is the Law's relation to the believer—judicially, the believer is emancipated⁶³ from the curse or penalty of the Law (Rom 7:1-6); morally, the believer is under bonds to obey the Law (vv. 22, 25). *Secondly*, he guards against a false inference being drawn from what he had taught in chapter 6. In Romans 6:1-11 he sets forth the believer's identification with Christ as “dead to sin” (vv. 2, 7, etc.). Then, from verse 11 onwards, he shows the effect this truth should have upon the believer's walk. In chapter 7 he follows the same order of thought. In 7:1-6 he treats of the believer's identification with Christ as “dead to the law” (see vv. 4, 6). Then, from verse 7 onwards he describes the experiences of the Christian. Thus the first half of Romans 6 and the first half of Romans 7 deal with the believer's *standing*, whereas the second half of each chapter treats of the believer's *state*; but with this difference: the second half of Romans 6 reveals what our state *ought to be*, whereas the second half of Romans 7 (vv. 13-25) shows what our state *actually is*.

1. The Conflict in the Believer

The controversy which has raged over Rom. 7 is largely the fruitage of the Perfectionism⁶⁴ of Wesley⁶⁵ and his followers. That brethren, whom we have cause to respect, should have adopted this error in a modified form, only shows how widespread today is the spirit of Laodiceanism.⁶⁶ To talk of “getting out of Romans 7 into Romans 8” is excuseless folly. Romans 7 and 8 both apply with undiminished force and pertinence to every believer on earth today. The second half of Romans 7 describes the conflict of the two natures in the child of God: it simply sets forth in detail what is summarized in Galatians 5:17. Romans 7:14, 15, 18, 19, and 21 are now true of every believer on earth. Every Christian falls far, far short of the standard set before him—we mean God's standard, not that of the so-called “victorious life” teachers. If any Christian reader is ready to

⁶³ **emancipated** – set free from slavery.

⁶⁴ **Perfectionism** – achieving a state of sinlessness in this life.

⁶⁵ **John Wesley** (1703-91) – English preacher; founder of Methodism.

⁶⁶ **Laodiceanism** – blind self-satisfaction (Rev 3:15-18).

say that Romans 7:19 does not describe his life, we say in all kindness, that he is sadly deceived. We do not mean by this that every Christian breaks the laws of men, or that he is an overt transgressor of the laws of God. But we do mean that his life is far, far below the level of the life our Savior lived here on earth. We do mean that there is much of “the flesh” still evident in every Christian—not the least in those who make such loud boastings of their spiritual attainments. We do mean that every Christian has urgent need to daily pray for the forgiveness of his daily sins (Luk 11:4), for “in many things we all stumble” (Jam 3:2, R.V.).

In what follows we shall confine ourselves to the last two verses of Romans 7, in which we read, “O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death? I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord. So then with the mind I myself serve the law of God; but with flesh the law of sin” (vv.24-25).

This is the language of a regenerate⁶⁷ soul, and it sums up the contents of the verses immediately preceding. The unregenerate man is wretched indeed, but he is a stranger to the “wretchedness” here expressed, for he knows nothing of the experience which evokes this wail. The whole context is devoted to a description of the conflict between the two natures in the child of God. “I delight in the law of God after the inward man” (v. 22), is true of none but born-again persons. But the one thus “delighting” discovers “another law in his members.” This reference must not be limited to his physical members, but is to be understood as including all the various parts of his carnal personality. This “other law” is also at work in the memory, the imagination, the will, the heart, etcetera.

This “other law,” says the apostle, warred against the law of his mind (the new nature), and not only so, it brought him “into captivity to the law of sin” (v. 23). To what extent he was brought into “captivity” is not defined. But brought into captivity he was, as is every believer. The wandering of the mind when reading God’s Word, the issuing from the heart (Mar 7:21) of evil thoughts when we are engaged in prayer, the horrid images which sometimes come before us in the sleep-state—to name no others—are so many examples of being “brought into captivity to the law of sin.” “If the evil principle of our nature prevails in exciting one evil thought, it has taken us captive. So far it has conquered, and so far are we defeated, and made a prisoner” (Robert Haldane, 1764-1842).

It is the consciousness of this warring within him and this being brought into captivity to sin, which causes the believer to exclaim, “O wretched man that I am!” This is a cry brought about by a deep realization of indwelling sin. It is the confession of one who knows that in his natural man there dwelleth no good thing. It is the mournful plaint of one who has discovered something of the horrible sink of iniquity which is in his own heart. It is the groan of a divinely-enlightened man who now hates himself—his natural self—and longs for deliverance.

⁶⁷ **regenerate** – spiritually reborn by the grace of God.

2. The Normal Experience of the Believer

This moan, “O wretched man that I am,” expresses the normal experience of the Christian, and any Christian who does not so moan is in an abnormal and unhealthy state spiritually. The man who does not utter this cry daily is either so out of communion with Christ, or so ignorant of the teaching of Scripture, or so deceived about his actual condition, that he knows not the corruptions of his own heart and the abject⁶⁸ failure of his own life.

The one who bows to the solemn and searching teaching of God’s Word, the one who there learns the awful wreckage which sin has wrought in the human constitution, the one who sees the exalted standard of holiness which God has set before us, cannot fail to discover what a vile wretch he is. If he is given to behold how far short he falls of attaining to God’s standard; if, in the light of the divine sanctuary, he discovers how little he resembles the Christ of God; then will he find this language most suited to express his godly sorrow. If God reveals to him the coldness of his love, the pride of his heart, the wanderings of his mind, the evil that defiles his godliest acts, he will cry, “O wretched man that I am.” If he is conscious of his ingratitude, of how little he appreciates God’s daily mercies; if he marks the absence of that deep and genuine fervor which ought ever to characterize his praise and worship of that One who is “glorious in holiness” (Exo 15:11); if he recognizes that sinful spirit of rebellion, which so often causes him to murmur or at least chafe against the dispensations⁶⁹ of God in his daily life; if he attempts to tabulate⁷⁰ not only the sins of commission but the sins of omission, of which he is daily guilty, he will indeed cry, “O wretched man that I am.”

Nor is it only the “backslidden” Christian, now convicted, who will mourn thus. The one who is truly in communion with Christ, will also emit this groan, and emit it daily and hourly. Yea, the closer he draws to Christ, the more will he discover the corruptions of his old nature, and the more earnestly will he long to be delivered from it. It is not until the sunlight floods a room that the grime and dust are fully revealed. So, it is only as we really come into the presence of Him who is the light, that we are made aware of the filth and wickedness which indwell us, and which defile every part of our being. And such a discovery will make each of us cry, “O wretched man that I am!”

“But,” inquires someone, “does not communion with Christ produce rejoicing rather than mourning?” We answer, it produces both. It did with Paul. In verse 22 of our chapter he says, “I delight in the law of God.” Yet only two verses later he cries, “O wretched man that I am!” Nor does this passage stand alone. In 2 Corinthians 6 the same apostle says, “As sorrowful, yet always rejoicing” (v.10). Sorrowful because of his failures, because of his daily sins. Rejoicing because of the grace which still bore with him, and because of the blessed provision which God has made even for the sins of His saints. So

⁶⁸ **abject** – miserable; wretched.

⁶⁹ **dispensations** – the ordering of events under divine authority.

⁷⁰ **tabulate** – to arrange systematically.

again in Romans 8:1 after declaring, "There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus," and after saying, "The Spirit himself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God: And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ" (vv. 16-17), the apostle adds, "But ourselves also, which have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, the redemption of our body" (v.23). Similar is the teaching of the apostle Peter, "Wherein ye greatly rejoice, though now for a season, if need be, ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations" (1Pe 1:6). Sorrow and groaning, then, are not absent from the highest spirituality.

In these days of Laodicean complacency and pride, there is considerable talk and much boasting about communion with Christ, but how little manifestation of it do we behold! Where there is no sense of utter unworthiness, where there is no mourning over the total depravity of our nature, where there is no sorrowing over our lack of conformity to Christ, where there is no groaning over being brought into captivity to sin; in short, where there is no crying, "O wretched man that I am," it is greatly to be feared that there is no fellowship with Christ at all.

When Abraham walked with the Lord, he exclaimed, "Behold now, I have taken upon me to speak unto the Lord, which am but dust and ashes (Gen 18:27). When Job came face to face with God, he said, "Behold I am vile" (Job 40:4), and again, "I abhor myself" (42:6). When Isaiah entered the divine Presence, he cried, "Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips" (Isa 6:5). When Daniel had that wondrous vision of Christ (Dan 10:5-6), he declared, "There remained no strength in me: for my comeliness was turned in me into corruption" (v.8). And in one of the last epistles by the beloved apostle to the Gentiles, we read, "This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief" (1Ti 1:15). These utterances proceeded not from unregenerate men, but came from the lips of God's saints. Nor were they the confessions of backslidden believers: rather were they voiced by the most eminent of the Lord's people. Where, today, shall we find any who are fit to be placed along side of Abraham, Job, Isaiah, Daniel and Paul? Where indeed! And yet, these were the men who were so conscious of their vileness and unworthiness!

3. The Confessions of Eminent Believers

"O wretched man that I am." This then is the language of a regenerate soul. It is the confession of the normal (undeceived and undeluded) Christian. The substance of it may be found not only in the recorded utterances of Old and New Testament saints, but as well, in the writings of the most eminent Christians who have lived during the last five hundred years. Different indeed were the confessions and witnessings borne by eminent saints of the past from the ignorant and arrogant boastings of modern Laodiceans! It is refreshing to turn from the present-day biographies to those written long ago. Ponder the following excerpts:

Mr. Bradford (1510-1555) of holy memory, who was martyred in the reign of bloody Queen Mary, in a letter to a fellow-prisoner in another penitentiary, subscribed himself thus: "The sinful John Bradford: a very painted hypocrite: the most miserable, hard-hearted, and unthankful sinner, John Bradford" (A.D. 1555).

Godly Rutherford (1600-1661) wrote, "This body of sin and corruption embitters and poisons our enjoyment. Oh that I were where I shall sin no more" (A.D. 1650).

Bishop Berkeley wrote, "I cannot pray, but I sin; I cannot preach, but I sin; I cannot administer, nor receive the holy sacrament, but I sin. My very repentance needs to be repented of: and the tears I shed need washing in the blood of Christ" (A.D. 1670).

Jonathan Edwards (1703-1758), in whose home died that remarkable man Mr. David Brainerd (the first missionary to the Indians, and whose devotion to Christ was witnessed to by all who knew him), and with whom he was intimately acquainted, says in his *Memoirs of Mr. Brainerd*, "His religious illuminations, affections, and comfort, seemed to a great degree to be attended with evangelical humiliation; consisting in a sense of his own utter insufficiency, despicableness, and odiousness; with an answering disposition and frame of heart. How deeply affected was he almost continually with his great defects in religion; with his vast distance from that spirituality and holy frame of mind that become a child of God; with his ignorance, pride, deadness, barrenness! He was not only affected with the remembrance of his former sinfulness, before his conversion, but with the sense of his present vileness and pollution. He was not only disposed to think other saints better than he; yea to look on himself as the worst and least of saints; but, very often, as the vilest and worst of mankind."

Jonathan Edwards himself, than whom few men have been more honored of God—either in their spiritual attainments or in the extent to which God has used them in blessing to others—near the end of his life wrote thus: "When I look into my heart and take a view of its wickedness, it looks like an abyss infinitely deeper than hell. And it appears to me, that, were it not for free grace, exalted and raised up to the infinite height of all the fullness and glory of the great Jehovah, I should appear sunk down in my sins below hell itself; far below the sight of everything, but the eye of sovereign grace, that alone can pierce down to such a depth. And it is affecting to think how ignorant I was, when a young Christian [alas, that so many older Christians are still ignorant of it.—A.W.P.], of the bottomless depths of wickedness, pride, hypocrisy and deceit left in my heart" (A.D. 1743).

Augustus Toplady (1740-1778) (author of "Rock of Ages"), wrote thus in his private diary under December 31, 1767—"Upon a review of the past year, I desire to confess that my unfaithfulness has been exceeding great; my sins still greater; God's mercies greater than both." And again, "My short-comings and my mis-doings, my unbelief and want of love, would sink me into the lowest hell, was not Jesus my righteousness and my Redeemer."

Listen to the words of that godly woman, the wife of that eminent missionary Adoniram Judson: "Oh how I rejoice that I am out of the whirlpool! Too gay, too trifling, for a

missionary's wife! That may be, but after all, gaiety is my lightest sin. It is my coldness of heart, my listlessness, my want of faith, my spiritual inefficiency and inertness, by love of self, the inherent and every-day pampered sinfulness of my nature, that makes me such a mere infant in the cause of Christ—not the attractions of the world.”

John Newton (1725-1807) (writer of that blessed hymn, “Amazing grace, how sweet the sound, that saved a wretch like me; I once was lost, but now am found, was blind, but now I see”), when referring to the expectations which he cherished at the outset of his Christian life, wrote thus: “But alas! these my golden expectations have been like South Sea dreams. I have lived hitherto a poor sinner, and I believe I shall die one. Have I, then, gained nothing? Yes, I have gained that which I once would rather have been without! Such accumulated proof of the deceitfulness and desperate wickedness of my heart, as I hope by the Lord’s blessing has, in some measure, taught me to know what I mean when I say, Behold, I am vile...I was ashamed of myself, when I began to seek it, I am more ashamed now.”

James Ingliss (editor of *Waymarks in the Wilderness*) at the close of his life, wrote Mr. J. H. Brookes, “As I am brought to take a new view of the end, my life seems so made up of squandered opportunities, and so barren of results, that it is sometimes very painful; but grace comes in to meet it all, and He will be glorified in my humiliation also” (1872). On which Mr. Brookes remarked, “How like him, and how unlike the boastings of those who are glorying in their fancied attainments!”

One more quotation: this time from a sermon by the late C. H. Spurgeon (1834-1892). Said the prince of preachers, “There are some professing Christians who can speak of themselves in terms of admiration; but, from my inmost heart, I loathe such speeches more and more every day that I live. Those who talk in such a boastful fashion must be constituted very differently from me. While they are congratulating themselves, I have to lie humbly at the foot of Christ’s Cross, and marvel that I am saved at all, for I know that I am saved. I have to wonder that I do not believe Christ more, and equally wonder that I am privileged to believe in Him at all—to wonder that I do not love Him more, and equally to wonder that I love Him at all—to wonder that I am not holier, and equally to wonder that I have any desire to be holy at all considering what a polluted debased, depraved nature I find still within my soul, notwithstanding all that divine grace has done in me. If God were ever to allow the fountains of the great deeps of depravity to break up in the best man that lives, he would make as bad a devil as the devil himself is. I care nothing for what these boasters say concerning their own perfections; I feel sure that they do not know themselves, or they could not talk as they often do. There is tinder enough in the saint who is nearest to heaven to kindle another hell if God should but permit a spark to fall upon it. In the very best of men there is an infernal and well-nigh infinite depth of depravity. Some Christians never seem to find this out. I almost wish that they might not do so, for it is a painful discovery for anyone to make; but it has the beneficial effect of making us cease from trusting in ourselves, and causing us to glory only in the Lord.”

4. *The Deliverance of the Believer*

Other testimonies from the lips and pens of men equally pious and eminent might be given, but sufficient have been quoted to show what cause the saints of all ages have had for making their own these words, “O wretched man that I am.” A few words now on the closing verse of Romans 7.

“Who shall deliver me from the body of this death?” “Who shall deliver me?” This is not the language of despair, but of earnest desire for help from without and above himself. That from which the apostle desired to be delivered is termed “the body of this death.” This is a figurative expression for the carnal nature termed “the body of sin,” and as having “members” (Rom 7:23). We therefore take the apostle’s meaning to be, Who shall deliver me from this deadly and noxious burden—my sinful self!

In the next verse the apostle answers his question, “I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord.” It should be obvious to any impartial mind that this looks forward to the future. His question was, “Who shall deliver me?” His answer is, *Jesus Christ will*. How this exposes the error of those who teach a present “deliverance” from the carnal nature by the power of the Holy Spirit. In His answer, the apostle says nothing about the Holy Spirit; instead, he mentions only “Jesus Christ our Lord.” It is not by the present work of the Spirit in us that Christians will be delivered “from this body of death,” but by the yet future coming of the Lord Jesus Christ for us. It is then that this mortal shall put on immortality, and this corruption shall put on incorruption.

But, as though to remove all doubt that this “deliverance” is future, the apostle concludes by saying, “So then with the mind I myself serve the law of God; but with the flesh the law of sin.” Let every reader note carefully that this comes after he had thanked God that he would be “delivered.” The last part of verse 25 sums up what he had said in the second part of Romans 7. It describes the Christian’s dual life. The new nature serves the law of God; the old nature, to the end of history, will serve “the law of sin.” That it was so with Paul himself is clear from what he wrote at the close of his life, when he termed himself “the chief” of sinners (1Ti 1:15). That was not the exaggeration of evangelical fervor, still less was it the mock modesty of hypocrisy. It was the assured conviction, the felt experience, the settled consciousness of one who saw deeply into the depths of corruption within himself, and who knew how far, far short he attained to the standard of holiness which God set before him. Such, too, will be the consciousness and confession of every other Christian who is not blinded by conceit. And the outcome of such a consciousness will be to make him long more ardently and thank God more fervently for the promised deliverance at the return of our Savior and Lord, when He shall “change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself” (Phi 3:21); and having done so, He will “present us faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy” (Jude 24). Hallelujah, what a Savior!

It is remarkable that the only other time the word “wretched,” (the only other time in the Greek too), is found in the New Testament, occurs in Revelation 3:17, where to

the Laodiceans Christ says, “and knowest not that thou *art wretched!*” Their boast was that they had “need of nothing.” They were so puffed up with pride, so satisfied with their attainments, that they knew not their wretchedness. And is not this what we witness on every hand today? Is it not evident that we are now living in the Laodicean period of the history of Christendom? Many were conscious of the “need,” but now they fancy they have received “the second blessing,” or “the baptism of the Spirit,” or that they have entered into “victory;” and, fancying this, they fondly imagine that their “need” has been met. And the proof of this is, they are the very ones who “know not” that they are “wretched.” With an air of spiritual superiority they will tell you that they have “got out of Romans 7 into Romans 8.” With pitiable complacency they will say that Romans 7 no longer depicts their experience. With smug satisfaction they will look down in pity upon the Christian who cries, “O wretched man that I am,” and like the Pharisee in the temple, they will thank God that it is otherwise with them. Poor blinded souls! It is to just such that the Son of God here says, “And knowest not that thou *art wretched.*” We say “blinded” souls, for mark, it is to these Laodiceans that Christ says, “Anoint thine eyes with eyesalve, that thou mayest *see!*” (Rev 3:18). It is to be observed that in the second half of Romans 7 the apostle speaks in the singular number. This is striking and most blessed. The Holy Spirit would intimate to us that the highest attainments in grace do not exempt the Christian from the painful experience there described. The apostle portrays with a master pen—himself sitting for the picture—the spiritual struggles of the child of God. He illustrates by a reference to his own personal experience the ceaseless conflict which is waged between the antagonistic natures in the one who has been born again.

May God in His mercy so deliver us from the spirit of pride which now defiles the air of modern Christendom, and grant us such an humbling view of our own uncleanness that we shall join the apostle in crying with ever-deepening fervor, “O wretched man that I am!” Yea, may God vouchsafe⁷¹ to both writer and reader such a view of their own depravity and unworthiness that they may indeed grovel in the dust before Him, and there praise Him for His wondrous grace to such hell-deserving sinners. ❧

Available in print as a booklet from Chapel Library.

The Believer's Paradox

“Lord, I believe; help thou my unbelief.”—Mark 9:24

⁷¹ **vouchsafe** – be so gracious as to grant.

1. Introduction

This was the honest confession of one whose faith had been put to a most severe test. It issued from a man who had a son possessed by a demon, which grievously tormented him: “wheresoever he taketh him, he teareth him: and he foameth, and gnasheth with his teeth, and pineth away” (Mar 9:18). What a sore trial was that for a tender parent! How thankful you should be, my reader, if in the sovereignty of God *you* are blest with normal and healthy children; and how sympathetic we should be toward those who have afflicted ones! No doubt this man had consulted different physicians, and perhaps had conferred with his pastor; but no relief had been obtained. What a testing of his submission to the will of God! Then he sought aid from Christ’s disciples, but they had been unable to effect any cure, and “hope deferred maketh the heart sick” (Pro 13:12). Such, in brief, is the background of our text.

And now the great Physician commanded that the tormented one should be brought to Him, but we read “And when he saw him, straightway the spirit tare him; and he fell on the ground, and wallowed foaming” (v. 20). Yes, matters generally seem to *get worse* with us when the Lord begins to take us in hand—to demonstrate that our extremity is God’s opportunity to manifest His sufficiency. It was thus with the afflicted Hebrews in Egypt. The darkest hour precedes the dawn. But what a tremendous testing of this man’s faith to behold his poor son foaming in agony at the Saviour’s feet! “And He asked his father, How long is it ago since this came unto him? And he said, Of a child. And oft-times it hath cast him into the fire, and into the waters, to destroy him: but *if* thou canst do anything, have compassion on us, and help us” (vv. 21-22). Did the Lord Jesus indignantly rebuke him for questioning His power, and turn away in disgust? No, for “great is his mercy” (Psa 103:11). Instead, He answered, “If thou canst believe, all things are possible to him that believeth” (v. 23), and we are told “And straightway the father of the child cried out, and said with tears, Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief.”

2. The Paradox Presented

“Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief.” How paradoxical was this language, for it was almost, if not quite, a contradiction in terms. If this man was a genuine believer, then why should he bemoan his unbelief? Or, since he bemoaned his unbelief, with what propriety could he claim to be a believer? It is like a man saying, I am hot, help thou my shivering coldness; I am strong, help my tottering weakness; for faith and unbelief are *opposites*. Ah there are many paradoxes in the Christian life, which are quite unintelligible to the wise of this world. That man has to become a fool in order to be wise (1Co 3:18), that he has to become a pauper in order to be made rich (Mat 5:3), that he has to be made weak in order to become strong (2Co 12:10), are enigmas⁷² that proud philoso-

⁷² **enigma** – something puzzling; an unsolved problem.

phers cannot elucidate.⁷³ But thank God, what remains mysterious to the wise and prudent among men, is revealed to those who are babes in His family.

Unbelief is part of *the entail*⁷⁴ of *the Fall*. By nature all of us are “children in whom is no faith” (Deu 32:20). Frightful thing is that! To have a heart which distrusts God; to have a heart which is ever prone to lean upon anyone and anything rather than upon the Lord Himself; to forsake the Fountain, and betake ourselves to “cisterns which hold no water.” Such is fallen man. Plenty of faith in himself, faith in his fellows, till he be disillusioned and disappointed; but no faith *in God*. That it is which explains why Christ is “despised and rejected of men” (Isa 53:3), so that in the days of His flesh He cried “O faithless and perverse generation, how long shall I be with you?” (Mat 17:17). This it is which accounts for the universal attitude of men toward both the Law and the Gospel: they believe not the Author and Giver of them, they are destitute of faith in Him; and thus they will continue all their days unless the Holy Spirit sovereignly intervenes and performs a miracle of grace in their hearts.

Unbelief *remains* in the hearts even of the regenerate.⁷⁵ Though God imparts to them the gift of faith, he removes not (in this life) the root of unbelief. The heroes of faith, whose portraits hang upon the walls of fame in Hebrews 11, experienced that solemn fact. Look at Abraham, the father of all them that believe: when famine arose in Canaan he went down to Egypt for succour,⁷⁶ and so afraid was he to trust his wife in the hands of God, he told a half-lie by saying she was his sister. Look at Moses; afraid to return to Egypt and confront Pharaoh after Jehovah had appeared to him at the burning bush and had promised the deliverance of His people (Exo 3); and later, complaining to Him because he had so evilly dealt with Israel (Exo 5:22, 23). Look at David, the slayer of Goliath, yet saying in his heart “I shall now perish one day by the hand of Saul” (1Sa 27:1). Look at the once intrepid⁷⁷ Elijah, fleeing in terror from Jezebel. Ah, my reader, the Holy Spirit has delineated the characters of the saints in the colours of truth and reality; not as they ought to have been, but as they actually were.

Unbelief is *the great burden* of the saint. It grieves his soul: the man in our text *wept* over it—do you? Feign would the Christian be freed from this incubus,⁷⁸ but the Lord does not see fit to remove it in this life. Frequently it acts like a cloud that covers the sun, for there is nothing so effectual as unbelief in hiding from us the light of God’s countenance. It fetters our spiritual movements and impedes our progress. There are times when the believer fears that his unbelief will utterly sink him. Yet painful though this experience be, it is nevertheless a most hopeful and encouraging sign. It is not until

⁷³ **elucidate** – to make clear; explain.

⁷⁴ **entail** – inheritance

⁷⁵ **regenerate** – spiritually changed by the Holy Spirit; born again.

⁷⁶ **succour** – help.

⁷⁷ **intrepid** – bold, fearless.

⁷⁸ **incubus** – an oppressive burden; a demon.

God has communicated faith that any soul is *conscious of* its unbelief! A living faith is necessary in order to recognize our dead unbelief. There must be divine light to see its existence and divine light to feel its power. Here, then, is solid comfort for those who are groaning over this burden: in your *unregenerate* days you were never *exercised over* your unbelief!

To genuinely mourn for our wicked unbelief is a sure evidence that divine life is present in the soul. Those who are strangers to God certainly do not make conscience⁷⁹ of such matters—how can they when they are quite unconscious of the plague of their hearts! But the Christian is not only conscious of unbelief, he goes to God and makes humble and contrite *confession* of the same. Yes, it is a sense of this grievous burden which drives him to the great Physician, crying, “Lord, I believe; *help thou* mine unbelief.” A true Christian does not cloak or excuse his unbelief, but honestly acknowledges it before God. Nor does he sit still and pity himself as one who is totally impotent and without any responsibility in the matter. No, he genuinely seeks “help,” which clearly denotes he is *resisting* this enemy, but needs divine assistance. True, without Christ he can do nothing (Joh 15:5), but he *can* do all things by Christ strengthening him (Phi 4:13).

3. The Paradox Solved

Here, then, is the solution to the difficulty and the explanation of the paradox presented by the language in our text. There are two distinct and totally different principles or “natures” indwelling the saint: faith and unbelief, and there is a continual opposition between them. They issue from the “spirit” and the “flesh,” concerning which we read, “the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other: so that ye cannot do the things which ye would” (Gal 5:17). It is this unceasing warfare between the two antagonistic⁸⁰ principles that give rise to a *dual experience*: one moment trusting God, the next doubting Him; one moment resting upon and drawing comfort from His promises, the next having no confidence in the same. And this dual and distressing experience moves him to cry “Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief.” Ah, my reader, if *you* are not plagued with and burdened by unbelief, if you do not humbly confess the same to God and seek His help about it, then are you of all men most miserable.

Contrariwise, as we have already said, here is that which provides real comfort for the conscience-distressed and Satan-harassed soul. How often the devil will tell a Christian, “Your profession is an empty one: you do not belong to the household of faith—how can you, when filled with unbelief!?” Listen, dear friend: the man in our text was a genuine believer, yet he owned *his* unbelief; and that is *recorded* for our instruction and comfort. This is one of the plainest possible proofs that we *are* believers. No unbeliever

⁷⁹ **make conscience** – bring into judgment of right and wrong.

⁸⁰ **antagonistic** – expressing hostility or opposition.

ever shed tears over his unbelief; no empty professor ever groaned because of his questioning of God; no hypocrite is burdened by his doubts and fears. No; such are filled with carnal confidence and fleshly assurance: *they* have not had a doubt about their salvation for years past. They can exercise faith any time, as easily as you can turn a tap and make the water come; but such is not the faith of God's elect.

The Text Further Examined

"Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief." There are four things here claiming our attention. First, the paradox presented: this, together with its solution, we have considered above. Second, a fact affirmed: "Lord, I believe." Third, a request preferred: "help thou." Fourth, a confession made: "mine unbelief." As it is often helpful to depart from the verbal arrangement of a text, we will do so here, and take up its several clauses in their inverse order, looking at this man's confession, then his petition for help, and then the plea by which he supported his request: "I believe."

4. The Confession

The Confession made: "mine unbelief." We will, very briefly, observe four things in connection with the same. First, it was an *honest* confession. This is the first thing that God requires from any praying soul: sincerity, genuineness, reality. He is not to be imposed upon by cant,⁸¹ nor will the mere uttering of words, however scriptural, gain His ear. Then be frank and artless⁸² in all your dealings with God, and never pretend to be what you are not: to the very end of your earthly pilgrimage, you will be (in yourself) a vile sinner, unworthy of the least of His mercies. This man did not claim to possess a faith that never wavered or boast that he was free from doubts and fears. No, he honestly *acknowledged* that the sum of his faith was frequently eclipsed by the dark clouds of unbelief. O to be delivered from all guile⁸³ when approaching the Throne of Grace.

Second, his confession was an *humble* one. That is the next thing which God requires from the praying soul: that he strip himself of the rags of self-righteousness and come before Him as one who is sinful and needy. This is very evident from the Epistle to the Laodiceans: they refused to abase themselves and take their proper place before the Lord. His charge was, "Thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked" (Rev 3:17). Alas, to how many professing Christians do those solemn words apply today! To all such Christ says, "I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich; and white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear; and anoint thine eyes with eyesalve, that thou mayest see" (v. 18). It is just at this very point that the Christian is distinguished from

⁸¹ **cant** – often repeated words or phrases of professional men.

⁸² **artless** – simple, sincere, free from deceit.

⁸³ **guile** – deceit

the hypocrite: the former humbles himself and takes his place before God in the dust, acknowledging his wicked unbelief.

Third, his confession was a *feeling* one, and this is the next thing which God requires from each praying soul, for He desires “truth (reality) in the inward parts” (Psa 51:6). It is not accurate and pious expressions, but a real sense of need in the soul which constitutes the essence of prayer. I might as well kneel down and worship gods of stone, as offer to the living God a prayer of words alone. That the confession of our text *was* a feeling one is evidenced by the fact that it was accompanied by *tears*. If the writer may be permitted to speak for his readers, is it not at *this* point that we so often fail the worst, especially in the confessing of our sins. Alas, how little are our hearts affected by them: how mechanical and impenitent⁸⁴ are the owning of our faults. Lord, melt our hard hearts.

Fourth, it was a *representative* confession, by which we mean it was suited to the case of all God’s children. There will never come a time in this world when such language is unfitted even for those who are members of the household of faith. No matter how much God is graciously pleased to increase our faith, indwelling unbelief will still be present to struggle against it. It is just this element which renders the prayers of Scripture so pertinent to the saints of all ages: they exactly suit their case and express their sentiments. “As in water face answereth to face, so the heart of man to man” (Pro 27:19).

5. The Petition

Let us consider next *his Petition*, for there is much in the details of this incident which affords us valuable instruction on the subject of prayer: “*help*, Lord.” First, look again at the *occasion* of it. This was an overwhelming anxiety over his afflicted son, finding relief in unburdening his heart to the Lord. And that is what all real supplication⁸⁵ is. There is far more genuine petitioning of God in seasons of adversity than during times of prosperity; and that is the reason why many a grief-wrung ejaculation,⁸⁶ or an inarticulate⁸⁷ groan reaches God’s ear, when many a nicely worded and carnally-admired “prayer” never reaches any higher than the ceiling of the room. Read through Psalm 107 and observe the repeated “Then”! When there is a real sense of need, a burdened soul requires no external “helps” as to what to say and how to say it; a cry spontaneously emanates⁸⁸ from the stricken soul and wings its way to heaven.

But there was something more than the pitiful state of his son which prompted this petition: the father was conscious that his own unbelief was hindering the desired bless-

⁸⁴ **impenitent** – unrepentant.

⁸⁵ **supplication** – earnest, humble request or plea.

⁸⁶ **ejaculation** – sudden, violent utterance.

⁸⁷ **inarticulate** – not able to be expressed understandably.

⁸⁸ **emanates** – moves or flows forth.

ing (or why did he cry out for “help” against it), and that was unbearable. If you had to carry a basket containing some articles which weighed only a few ounces, you would never think of asking someone for a helping hand; but if you were staggering along with a load that weighed twenty or thirty pounds, you would beg assistance—unless you were too proud and independent to seek it. And so it is in heart matters: the more we make conscience of the thoughts and intents of the same, the more we are exercised over that which is disorderly and God-dishonouring. The more we grow in grace, the more keenly we shall feel such irregularities.

Second, consider the *spirituality* of his plea. The more spiritual the soul becomes, the more spiritual are its petitions. It is a sure mark of spiritual immaturity when relief from bodily ailments are more valued by us than deliverance from moral maladies, or when material mercies are prized above an increase of our graces. This man did not cry out, “Lord, heal my son”—that had been *natural*; but “Lord, help mine unbelief”—that was truly *spiritual*. The fact is that many of the most spiritual prayers issue from those who regard themselves as being the least spiritual; yea, who seriously doubt if they have any spirituality at all. Unspiritual souls never pray for help against unbelief. It is much to be thankful for when we are made painfully conscious of our unbelief, for thousands of church-members never are so; and it is a still greater cause for praise when we are honestly burdened thereby, and moved to pray for deliverance.

Third, its *meaning*. This man recognized that the Lord was the only one who could effectually aid him. Ah, it is a grand thing when we are brought to the point where we realize that none but God Himself can subdue the workings of this evil in us. All self-help is vain; all fellow-creatures are powerless to render any relief—they cannot relieve themselves, still less others. Then “Cast thy burden upon the LORD, and he shall *sustain thee*” (Psa 55:22). This man definitely applied to Christ. It is indeed a blessed thing when we are so oppressed by our unbelief that we betake⁸⁹ ourselves to the great Physician: so many groan under it, but do no more; others hug it to themselves, and get no further. “Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief”: put forth Thy gracious power and subdue this God-dishonouring spirit; enable me to strive against it. Suffer me not to excuse it, or to pity myself for it and fatalistically⁹⁰ yield to it. Cause me to regard it as an evil to be hated, an enemy to be resisted, a sin to be confessed.

Fourth, mark its *comprehensiveness*. His petition was exceeding brief, yet it covered much ground. As faith is the root from which all good works proceed, so unbelief is the source of all evil. This is our master sin, “*the sin which doth so easily beset us*” (Heb 12:1). Unbelief is the cause of all our troubles and failures. This is the strategic point where Satan concentrates his forces against us, and therefore it is *here* above all that we need divine *help*. “Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief”: Lord, I do expect Thee to

⁸⁹ **betake** – commit.

⁹⁰ **fatalistically** – regarding every event as unavoidable.

undertake for me, yet I am not able to exclude all doubting; I am persuaded of Thy power and pity, but enable me to rely upon Thee more fully and constantly.

6. The Plea

We turn now to *the Plea* which accompanied this prayer for help, for so we may legitimately regard these words, “Lord, I believe.” His cry for divine assistance, accompanied by an humble confession, was made on this ground: because I believe, Lord, take pity upon me and subdue mine unbelief. To obtain the granting of our petition it must be backed up by some valid and suitable argument. Prayer is something more than presenting a request to God; it is *pleading with Him*, presenting some reason why He should grant that for which we ask. There are various pleas we may make; such as, because I am in deep need of the same, because Thou hast promised to supply it, because it will be for Thy glory to do so; for Christ’s sake. This is what the Lord means when He says, “Produce your cause, saith the LORD; bring forth your strong reasons, saith the King of Jacob” (Isa 41:21).

First, then, this plea was a *necessary* one, for God will not hear an unbeliever. “But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him” (Heb 11:6). “Lord, I believe,” not as I would do, nor as I should do; yet I deny not Thy existence, I question not the verity⁹¹ of Thy Word, I am persuaded Thou canst not lie, I doubt not Thy power, Thy goodness, Thy mercy. I *believe*, though feebly, haltingly, spasmodically.⁹² I appeal to Thee, O Thou Searcher of hearts: Thou seest the little spark of fire beneath the smouldering flax, the flicker of faith behind the clouds of unbelief. Ah, is it not at this point we so often fail: when presenting our petitions we must *accompany them with suitable pleas*, for then God sees we are in earnest. Study carefully Christ’s prayer in John 17 and observe how each request is supported by a reason or plea—either before or after, in the words “that,” “for,” etc.

Second, it is an *instructive* plea. What valuable teaching is there here for those who desire to pray aright! In our ignorance and foolishness, *we* had probably concluded that such a prayer as this man made was unsuitable and unseemly—a contradiction in terms. It is recorded for our learning. One great lesson it inculcates⁹³ is that we ought never to look on our graces without also viewing our infirmities; nor should we confess our sins without also owning the Spirit’s fruit in us. For example, if I am made sensible of my deep need of more humility, when asking God for the same, I should acknowledge my pride; contrariwise, when confessing my pride, I should thank God for humbling my

⁹¹ **verity** – enduring truth.

⁹² **spasmodically** – fitfully; intermittently.

⁹³ **inculcates** – teaches and impresses, often by repetition.

heart to do so. If I am begging for more patience and submission, I must confess my self-will and fractiousness;⁹⁴ yet also thank God for making me feel my need of the opposites.

Third, it was an *acceptable* plea. God is pleased when His people own their relationship to Him, pleading that they are His children, and acknowledging the Spirit's work within. It is a false and reprehensible⁹⁵ humility which refuses so to do. Observe the example of David: "O *my* God, I *trust* in thee: let not mine enemies triumph over me" (Psa 25:2); "In thee, O LORD, *do I* put my trust; let me never be ashamed: deliver me in thy righteousness" (Psa 31:1); "Preserve my soul; *for I am holy*: O thou my God, save thy servant that *trusteth* in thee" (Psa 86:2). Observe how Asaph pleaded with God the relationship which Israel sustained to Him: "Remember thy congregation, which thou hast purchased of old" (Psa 74:2). This is the very ground taken by our great High Priest when interceding for His people: "I pray for them: I pray not for the world, but for them which thou hast given me; *for they are thine*" (Joh 17:9). We, then, shall pray acceptably if we plead "Lord, I am Thine, undertake for me; I am a believer, subdue mine unbelief."

Fourth, it was a *prevailing* plea. Of course it was: had not Christ said, "If thou canst believe, all things are possible to him that believeth" (Mar 9:23). This dear man's petition gained the day: the Lord undertook for him, and his poor son was made whole. When we really believe, the battle is half, nay nine-tenths, won. It all turns upon that: it is the prayer of faith which gains the ear and moves the hand of God. Hence, when we read of Abraham that "he staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief; but was strong in faith, giving glory to God" (Rom 4:20), *we* should cry "Lord, *I believe*; help thou mine unbelief." As we read, "If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all liberally, and upbraideth not; and it *shall* be given him" (Jam 1:5), *we* should cry "Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief," for it is written, "but let him *ask in faith* nothing wavering" (Jam 1:6).

7. Applications

We may apply our text to those *seeking salvation*. There may be a reader of this article who is halting between two opinions. He is convinced that Christ alone can meet his needs and satisfy his soul, yet he finds it so hard to give up the world and abandon his idols. He knows full well that in Christ alone is eternal life to be found, yet Satan still has such a hold upon him that he cannot surrender to the Lord Jesus and forsake the pleasures of sin. Then come to Him and say, "Lord, I believe; *help thou* mine unbelief." Or, it may be, he feels himself to be such a godless wretch that he fears his case is hopeless: having sinned so grievously against light and privileges, he dares not venture upon the Gospel promises. Come to Christ and cry from the heart, "Lord I believe; help thou mine unbelief."

⁹⁴ **fractiousness** – a cross or snappish temper.

⁹⁵ **reprehensible** – deserving rebuke; blameworthy.

Our text may be applied unto *God's providences*. The Christian can say "the LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want" (Psa 23:1), yet when circumstances seem to be all against him, he is unable to appropriate the blessed truth that God shall supply all his need (Phi 4:19). Fearful that he shall come to abject destitution,⁹⁶ he is unable to fully trust the Lord. Then come to Christ and say, "Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief." Many a one can say I am sure that "all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose" (Rom 8:28) means what it says, yet there are some things in his circumstances which he finds exceedingly difficult to believe will issue in real good for him. Instead of submitting to God's disposing⁹⁷ will, he is often full of rebellion; instead of kissing the rod, he finds himself kicking against it. Then come to Christ and say, "Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief."

Our text may be applied to *personal assurance*. How many a Satan-harassed believer is exclaiming, I greatly fear that I cannot be among the saved, for if I were, I surely would not sin as I do. In view of the raging of my lusts, the frequency of which they overcome my every effort to resist them, it would be presumptuous to affirm that the reigning power of sin was dethroned within *me*. My friend, David cried "iniquities prevail against me" (Psa 65:3). But you say, My heart is such a sink of iniquity, I dare not claim to be regenerated; often I do not loathe sin, nor even desire to. Ah, but it is not always thus: are not such seasons followed by contrition and confession!? Yes, you say, but right after I fall again into the mire, sometimes deeper than before; ah, but do you *stay* there? Do you completely abandon the Throne of Grace? Does not a cry of distress go up from you to God? Then *continue* crying "Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief." May God add His blessing to this sermon for His name's sake. ❧

Available as a booklet from Chapel Library.

Christian Liberty

1. The Law and the Saint

The unregenerate⁹⁸ sinner is, in heart and practice, an Antinomian; that is, one who is *opposed* to the Law of God. Proof of this is furnished by Romans 8:7, which tells us, "The carnal⁹⁹ mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the Law of God, neither

⁹⁶ **abject destitution** – extreme poverty.

⁹⁷ **disposing** – regulating; setting in order.

⁹⁸ **unregenerate** – not born of God's spirit.

⁹⁹ **carnal** – fleshly; sensual, as opposed to spiritual.

indeed can be.” It needs to be remembered that the “carnal mind” still remains in the believer. It is true that the Christian has a new mind (2Ti 1:7), which is part of the new nature—a mind which “*serves* the Law of God” (Rom 7:25); and it is this, alone, that explains the *conflict* waged daily within every saint. But the presence of the carnal mind within, reveals the urgent need there is for the “casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought *to the obedience of Christ*” (2Co 10:5). This can be accomplished *only* as the believer yields his members [not only the members of his body, but *every* “member” of his complex personality] “*servants* to righteousness unto holiness” (Rom 6:19).

But does not this expression “yielding our members as *servants* to righteousness” savor of *legality*, and is not that entirely at variance¹⁰⁰ with Christian *liberty* ? And here we reach, perhaps, what has seemed a real difficulty to many. Yet the Scriptures cited are so plain that their meaning is not open to question. The binding obligations of the Law of God upon every Christian have, we trust, been unequivocally¹⁰¹ established. But now the question naturally arises—what, then, of Christian liberty? Did not the Lord Himself promise, “If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be *free indeed*” (Joh 8:36)? Did not the apostle Paul, under the Holy Spirit, write, “Stand fast therefore in *the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free*, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage” (Gal 5:1)? How are we to understand these statements? Are they to be evacuated of all meaning? If not, how is it possible to fairly and satisfactorily harmonize them with the affirmation that Christians *are* under bonds to obey the Ten Commandments?

In seeking an answer to the above questions several things need be borne in mind. *First*, we may be fully assured that the Holy Scriptures contain no contradictions. *Second*, we need to be very careful in defining our terms: and to define them correctly we must make a patient and thorough search of the Word. In the *third* place, whatever true Christian liberty is, certainly, *obedience to God* does not conflict with it. It was to men whom He had *already* “made free” that the Son said, “If ye love Me, *keep My commandments*” (Joh 14:15). And it was to those who *were* in the enjoyment of Christian liberty that one of His Apostles was moved to write, “And whatsoever we ask, we receive of Him, because we *keep His commandments*” (1Jo 3:22). Thus, it is evident that we must distinguish sharply between Christian liberty and lawlessness.

2. Liberty and Lawlessness

The term “Christian liberty,” like many another, is used very loosely by our moderns. We greatly fear that to many, who though bearing the name of Christians, have never been born again—Christian liberty means *license to do as one pleases*. We are far from affirming, or even insinuating, that this is true of *all* those who deny that believers are under obligations to “serve the Law of God.” With many, their hearts are better than

¹⁰⁰ **variance** – an active disagreement; dispute.

¹⁰¹ **unequivocally** – plainly; clearly.

their heads, their lives superior to their creeds. But, nevertheless, it cannot be gainsaid,¹⁰² that to the popular mind Law and liberty are opposing terms. Many of the Lord's own people are being taught that legal restrictions are incompatible with true Christian liberty, and this in the face of the words of the Saviour—"teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have *commanded you*" (Mat 28:20).

It is now being proclaimed on almost every side that grace rules out all Law. Nor is this to be wondered at, for Christ plainly foretold that lawlessness *should* abound (Mat 24:12). But though it is not to be wondered at, it is to be deeply deplored that some, whom we have good reasons to look upon as the Lord's servants, should be found lending themselves to forwarding this incoming tide of spiritual anarchy.¹⁰³ The Word of truth declares that grace reigns "*through righteousness*" (Rom 5:21), not at the expense of it; and there can be no righteousness apart from law. Righteousness is right doing; and right doing is conformity to law. The only other alternative is what the writer of the book of Judges speaks of, namely, "Every man doing that which was right in *his own eyes*" (21:25), which is a state of anarchy.

Liberty and license¹⁰⁴ are as far apart as the poles. True liberty is *subjection to Law*, paradoxical¹⁰⁵ as that may sound. To the unregenerate mind the terms of Christian life must appear to abound in paradoxes. "When I am *weak*, then am I *strong*" (2Co 12:10), will seem a contradiction in terms to one who is devoid of spiritual intelligence. But is it meaningless to the real Christian? We think not. Whether he understands it or not, he knows full well that it is the inspired declaration of God's Word. Equally foolish must it appear to the unbeliever to read, that: When a man becomes the *slave* of Christ, then is he *free*! Nevertheless, that is what God's Word affirms, and it is what Christian experience confirms. Little as the mind of the flesh may be able to grasp it, is it not nevertheless a fact that, when we are the *most elevated* spiritually we take the *lowest* place before God? That when we are the holiest we are most conscious of our sinful defilements? Equally so is it true that we enjoy the greatest spiritual freedom when we are most in subjection to God's Law. What saith the Scriptures? This—"I will walk at liberty, for I seek thy *precepts*" (Psa 119:45). The natural man imagines that to be subject to God's "precepts" is to be confined to a narrow place; but the mind illumined by the Holy Spirit will acknowledge, "Thy commandment is *exceeding broad*" (Psa 119:96).

After these preliminary considerations we shall now attempt to define the Scriptural import of Christian liberty. Not that we profess to give here a complete or exhaustive definition, nevertheless, we believe it will include the primary elements and aspects of it.

¹⁰² **gainsaid** – spoken against; contradicted.

¹⁰³ **anarchy** – complete absence of government; lawlessness.

¹⁰⁴ **license** – excessive, undisciplined liberty.

¹⁰⁵ **paradoxical** – seemingly contradictory to common belief.

3. Deliverance from the Wrath of God

The relation which the Christian, before conversion, stood to God (because of sin) was that of a condemned criminal. By nature he was a child “of wrath, even as others” (Eph 2:3). By birth he belonged to a race which is under the curse of God. In Adam he sinned, and upon him rested the righteous condemnation of a sin-hating God (Psa 58:3). Because of this he was together with all others of Adam’s race, looked at as a criminal in prison, awaiting execution.

But, all praise to His peerless name, it was to deliver just such that the Son of God became incarnate. He was sent “to proclaim liberty *to the captives*, and *the opening of the prison* to them that are bound” (Isa 60:1). This was His *first* ministerial utterance (see Luke 4:16-18). Nor was this to be confined to Jewish sinners. Of old the Lord declared, I will “give thee for a covenant of the people, for a light of *the Gentiles* . To open the blind eyes, *to bring out the prisoners from the prison*, and them that sit in darkness out of the prison house” (Isa 42:6, 7).

The Gospel, then, proclaims “*liberty* to the captives” (Isa 61:2), and the one who believes its joyous message is immediately and forever freed from that awful prison in which he lay as a culprit condemned. The Gospel tells him *how* this could be righteously accomplished. Another took his place; a Substitute suffered in his stead. And of Him it is written, “*He was taken from prison and from judgment*” (Isa 53:8). He entered, for His people, the place of condemnation, and from it He was taken to judgment. That is one reason why He was crucified between two “malefactors,” to show us the more plainly *the place* He took! Only thus could we be liberated. When the Judge delivers the culprit to the officer and he is “cast into prison,” the divine sentence is, “Thou shalt by no means come out thence, till thou hast paid the uttermost farthing” (Mat 5:25, 26). And because *we* had “nothing (with which) to pay” (Luk 7:42), the Lord Jesus paid the full redemption price for us, by suffering in our stead “the whole of wrath divine.” In consequence of this we are delivered. No longer prisoners, but free men are we. No longer under God’s righteous wrath, but delivered from all condemnation (Rom 8:1).

Here, then, is the first aspect of Christian liberty: deliverance from the wrath of God. The disobedient are “spirits *in prison*” (1Pe 3:19); but those who have obeyed God’s command to believe on His Son have been “made free” (Joh 8:36), free from the sentence of condemnation.

4. Deliverance from the Power of the Devil

Christians in their unregenerate state, “walked according to the course of this world, according to the Prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience” (Eph 2:2). The ungodly are the slaves of Satan. Said our Lord to the Pharisees, “Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do” (Joh 8:44). Men are “taken *captive* by him (the devil) at his will” (2Ti 2:26).

Now the Gospel is God's appointed agency for delivering men from their awful bondage to the devil. When the Lord commissioned the apostle Paul to go unto the Gentiles, He sent him "to open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and *from the power of Satan* unto God" (Act 26:18). Christians are a people who have been delivered from "the power of darkness (Satan) and translated into the kingdom of God's dear Son" (Col 1:13). Hebrews 2:14-15 tells how this was made possible for us: "Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same; that he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil; and deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage." Here, then, is the second aspect of Christian liberty: believers in Christ have been *delivered* from that *bondage* to which they had been, all their lifetime, subject. Consequently, to them the promise now is: "Resist the devil, and he will *flee* from you" (Jam 4:7).

5. Deliverence from the Bondage of Sin

The unregenerate are the *slaves* of sin: "Whosoever committeth sin is the bondslave of sin" (Joh 8:34). So completely are the wicked under the dominion of sin they *cannot* of themselves think a godly thought, beget a godly aspiration,¹⁰⁶ or perform a godly deed. They *cannot* come to Christ (Joh 6:44). They *cannot* hear His Word (Joh 8:43). They *cannot* believe (Joh 12:39). They *cannot* receive the Holy Spirit (Joh 14:17). They *cannot* please God (Rom 8:8). And in each case the reason why they cannot is because they are the bondslaves of sin. And in that condition they will remain unless the Son shall "make them free."

That the natural man is ignorant of this bondage only evidences how completely he is under the dominion of sin. His understanding is darkened. That he boasts of being a free-agent only demonstrates the derangement of his mind. The same men who call darkness light, and light darkness; who term wisdom, folly, and deem folly to be wisdom; also regard true freedom as bondage; and consider their own bondage, freedom. Ever since man drank in that deadly poison, "Ye shall be *as God*" (Gen 3:5), his descendants have affected a dominion over themselves, and have disregarded the Lordship of their Maker. Their boast is, "With our tongue will we prevail; our lips are our own: *who* is lord over us?" (Psa 12:4). They suppose that the only true liberty is to be at the command and under the control of none above themselves. They think that to live according to their own heart's desire is to assert their free-agency. But *that* is bondage and thralldom¹⁰⁷ of the worst kind.

The natural man may cherish the delusion that *he* is not hampered by the bonds which restrict the liberty of the saints. He may think himself free to go where he wills, and free to do as he pleases, untrammelled¹⁰⁸ by divine restraints. But this only proves

¹⁰⁶ **aspiration** – strong desire or ambition.

¹⁰⁷ **thralldom** – servitude; slavery.

¹⁰⁸ **untrammelled** – unrestricted.

that the god of this world (Satan) *has* “blinded his mind” (2Co 4:4). Instead of being free he “*serves divers lusts*” (Ti 3:3). Instead of carving his own career, he is simply walking “according to the Prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience” (Eph 2:2). Instead of being master of himself, he is doing the desires of his father, the devil (Joh 8:44). And little as he knows it, *God Himself* “restrains” him (Psa 76:10). The truth is, that the most awful punishment which God ever inflicts upon men in this world is to abandon them to themselves. “So I *gave them up* unto their own hearts’ lust: and they walked in their own counsels” (Psa 81:12).

But believers have been *delivered* from the dominion of sin: “Being then made free from sin” (Rom 6:18). Christians have been emancipated from their former bondage: “Sin shall not have *dominion over* you” (Rom 6:14) is now the divine promise to them. It is not that the sinful nature has been removed from them, but that its sovereign power has been broken. Sin may harass them but they are no more its *slaves*. Believers may fall but they shall not be utterly cast down (Psa 37:24). Here, then, is the third aspect of Christian liberty: believers have been delivered from the bondage of sin, and if they will but avail themselves of God’s all-sufficient grace, they will find that full provision has been made for them to enjoy *complete* deliverance from the servitude of sin. That we do not enjoy this is entirely our own fault.

6. Deliverance from the Authority of Man

The Christian belongs to Christ. He has been bought with a price. He is “the Lord’s freeman” (1Co 7:22). Consequently no man and no set of men have any right to impose any restraints on his conscience. No man and no set of men have any right to tell the Christian what he must believe or what he must do (his civic life excepted). For the State to interfere in connection with spiritual things is iniquitous¹⁰⁹ tyranny. If the State were to demand my subscription to a man-made creed, that would be an attack upon my Christian freedom. If the State were to demand that my children should be baptized and join some church, that would be an unlawful infringement of my Christian liberty. The Lord’s people in the United States cannot be sufficiently thankful to God for the religious liberty which is granted them in this favored land. And the least they can do in return is to earnestly pray the Lord for His blessing to rest on the President and the members of Congress, that such privileges may be continued.

It is this particular aspect of Christian freedom which the apostle pressed upon the Galatian saints. They had been harassed by certain Judaizers who demanded that they be circumcised; and it was in view of *this* (and of this alone) that the apostle said to them, “Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage” (Gal 5:1). He hereby reminds them that to submit to the demand of the Judaizers would be to repudiate¹¹⁰ the liberty wherewith Christ

¹⁰⁹ **iniquitous** – wicked; unjust.

¹¹⁰ **repudiate** – disown or cast off publicly.

had made them free. Mark that Paul is not here addressing Jewish believers, but Gentile believers. Proof of this is found in the very next verse: “*If ye be circumcised.*”

From *what*, then, had the Galatian believers been “made free” by Christ? The answer is, from the requirements and commandments, from the rites and ceremonies of man-made religions. “When ye knew not God,” said the apostle, “ye did service [“ye were in *bondage*,” Bagster’s Interlinear] unto them which by nature are no gods” (Gal 4:8). They had been slaves to human traditions and authority. In principle, then, these Judaizers, *unauthorized* by God, were seeking to drag them back again into that from which they had been delivered. Hence, continues the apostle, “after that ye have known God, or rather are known of God, how turn ye *again* to the weak and beggarly elements, whereunto ye desire *again* to be in bondage?” (Gal. 4:9). To submit to circumcision at the hands of men, was not better than a return to their heathen rites. Therefore said the apostle, “stand fast in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made you free, and *be not* entangled again with the yoke of bondage.” Disdain¹¹¹ these Judaizers. Refuse to heed them. Do not allow them to rob you of your Christian liberty. *They* have no right to issue commandments nor impose ordinances. You belong to Christ—heed *His* commandments and submit to *His* ordinances.

Our comments above on Galatians 5:1 are confirmed by what we read of in 5:10-13: “And I, brethren, if I yet preach *circumcision*, why do I yet suffer persecution? Then is the offence of the cross ceased. I would *they* were even cut off *which trouble you*. For, brethren, ye have been called unto liberty.” Thus it is clear that the “liberty” of which the apostle treats in this epistle is emancipation from all human authority in religious matters, for it was not the moral Law but *circumcision* that these Judaistic “troublers” were pressing upon these Galatian saints.

It is this particular aspect of Christian freedom which the apostle also pressed on the Colossian saints. The Colossian church had been troubled by Gnostics,¹¹² who sought to impose their system of asceticism¹¹³ upon the Lord’s people. They had drawn up a series of prohibitions which the apostle summarizes in the words, “Touch not; taste not; handle not, which are all to perish with the using” (Col 2:21-22). With these saints the apostle expostulates: “Wherefore if ye be dead with Christ from the rudiments of the world, why, as though living in the world, are ye subject to ordinances, after the commandments and doctrines of *men*?” (vv 20, 22). His argument here is parallel with the one he used with the Galatians. You belong to Christ, he reminds them (“dead with Him”), why then descend from this privileged place and heed the rules of *men*. Such rules, admits the apostle, “have indeed a *show* of wisdom in will worship, and humility, and neglecting of the body,” etc. But a “show” is *all* they have, for they are “*to perish* with the using.” Well would it be if many of our moderns would study these verses, for there are not a few

¹¹¹ **disdain** – refuse or reject with contempt or scorn.

¹¹² **Gnostics** –an occult sect that believed matter to be evil.

¹¹³ **asceticism** – a religious doctrine of rigorous self-denial.

today who are seeking to impose *their own* “commandments and doctrines” of “touch not, taste not, handle not.” Insofar as Christians heed them they are robbed of their liberty. When a man believes the Gospel, with enlightened faith, he accepts Christ as the alone Lord of his conscience, faith and conduct. “One is your Master, even Christ” (Mat 23:8), therefore, should he refuse to allow any man (or any woman) to dictate to him what he should touch or taste or handle. Let him give himself, unreservedly, to learning the mind of *Christ* and responding to it, and leave others to be brought into bondage to “the commandments and doctrines of *men*” if they are so determined. Let others “neglect” their “bodies” if they wish to; for our part, we believe that “Every creature of God is good, and nothing to be refused, if it be received with thanksgiving” (1Ti 4:4); and we desire grace to use them all to God’s glory.

7. Deliverance unto the Service of God

Thus far we have considered only the negative side—what Christians have been delivered from. Now we take up the positive—*what Christians are delivered unto*. True liberty is not the right to live as we please, but the power to live as we ought. It is being delivered from the bondage of condemnation, Satan, sin, and men, so that the Christian is now free to serve **God**. Regeneration effects *a change of masters*. The one who before was the captive of Satan and the slave of sin is now free to serve God. The lawless rebel has become a loyal subject. This is the central truth in the second half of Romans 6. We confine ourself now to Romans 6:16-18 and 22, and as these are so pertinent we give a brief, but clause by clause, exposition:

Verse 16: “Know ye not”—I appeal to a common fact of observation. “that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are to whom ye obey.” If I see a number of laborers working in a field, I at once conclude they are the servants of the proprietor of that field. This illustrates the principle which the apostle here develops and applies. If men are doing the work of Satan, they must be his servants; if they are engaged in the work of God, they must be *His* servants. Sin is here personified, and sinners are termed its “slaves.” “Whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness.” Death is the wages which sin pays its servants. “Obedience” is also personified here.

Verse 17: “But God be thanked, that ye were the servants of sin, but ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine whereto ye were delivered.” Those who had formerly been the slaves of sin were now the servants of righteousness, and for this the apostle returns thanks to God. They had obeyed “from the heart,” for Christian obedience is spontaneous and cordial, not constrained by fear or produced by force. “That form of doctrine whereto ye were delivered.” The Greek words here refer to the moulding of metal. When the melted metal is transferred to a mould, it obeys or conforms to its form. So believers respond to and take their form of character from the mould of divine doctrine.

Verse 18: “Being then made free from sin.” In their unregenerate state, God’s saints were the slaves of sin; but the Gospel has emancipated¹¹⁴ them. This emancipation is an intrinsic¹¹⁵ part of their freedom, though it is far from signifying a state of sinless perfection, or even entire deliverance from the influence of sin. “Ye became the servants of righteousness.” Servants of righteousness are men obedient to righteousness.

Verse 22: “But now being made free from sin, and become servants to God, ye have your fruit unto holiness, and the end everlasting life.” Believers have been emancipated from the state of sin’s slavery, and have become the bond-slaves of God. There has been a complete change of masters. The subjection of a slave is absolute and continuous. The slave does not obey his own will, but that of his master. He is under an influence which secures obedience. This is true of spiritual as in natural and external relations. But there is this vital difference: the slaves of sin are in the most direful¹¹⁶ bondage; whereas the bond-slaves of God enjoy true liberty. The slave of sin is the helpless victim of his depraved nature; but the bond-slave of God serves freely—his obedience is from *the heart!*

“Christians are free in reference to God. They are ‘the Lord’s freeman’ (1Co 7:22). By this we do not mean that they are not under the strongest obligations to conform their minds and wills to the mind and will of God, and to regulate the whole of their temper and conduct according to the revelation of that mind and will revealed in His Word. They are not free in the sense of being without law to God; to be so, would be the reverse of a privilege; they are ‘under the law to Christ’ (1Co 9:21)” (Dr. John Brown).

In a word, then, Christian liberty is the freedom of *children* in contrast from the bondage of *prisoners*, and just as children are (normally) subject to the government of their parents, so are God’s children subject to His government; and the Law is for the regulation of their conduct.

But one more question needs to be faced ere we conclude, namely—if we *are* under the Law as a rule of life, are we not then subject to its *curse*? If we break it, must not its curse, necessarily, come upon us? Decidedly not, is our answer. And why? Because Christ suffered its “curse” in the stead of His people (Gal 3:13). David, Elijah, Daniel were “under the Law” (not for salvation, but governmentally), and they broke it. Were *they*, then, under its curse? Surely not. On what principle, then (governmental principle) does God act toward His *children* who break the Law? A pertinent¹¹⁷ question, and one to which a clear Scriptural answer may be returned. Let the reader turn to Psalm 89 and there he will read, “If his children forsake my Law and walk not in my judgments; if they break my statutes, and keep not my commandments; Then will I visit their transgression with the rod, and their iniquity with stripes, Nevertheless my loving kindness will I not utterly take from him, nor suffer my faithfulness to fail” (vv. 30-33)!

¹¹⁴ **emancipated** – set free from slavery; released from bondage.

¹¹⁵ **intrinsic** – belonging to the real nature of a thing.

¹¹⁶ **direful** – dreadful; terrible.

¹¹⁷ **pertinent** – relevant; to the point.

In closing, let us repeat, that Christian liberty is not only emancipation from sin and Satan, but it is deliverance unto the service of God: “Circumcision is nothing, and uncircumcision is nothing, but *the keeping of the commandments of God* ...he that is called, being free, is Christ’s *servant*,” that is, “bond-slave” (1Co 7:19,22). Freedom that does not issue in “keeping the commandments of God” is a delusion. “As free, and not using your liberty for a cloak of maliciousness,¹¹⁸ but as *the bondslaves of God*” (1Pe 2:16). The greatest freedom is enjoyed by him who is most subject to the Law of God which is “holy and just and good” (Rom 7:12). That is why God’s Law is termed “the law of *liberty*” (Jam 2:12), an expression which must be utterly unintelligible to the carnal mind, but one that is perfectly simple to the man who is controlled by the Holy Spirit. Anything short of this complete subjection to the Law is bondage. Let us not be deceived, then, by those who promise a *spurious*¹¹⁹ liberty, for “they themselves are the slaves of corruption” (2Pe 2:19). Let us not be found “turning the grace of our God into lasciviousness”¹²⁰ (Jude 1:4). Rather let us heed that word of the apostle Paul, “For, brethren, ye have been called unto liberty; only use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh, but by love serve one another” (Gal 5:13). Be these the breathings of our soul: Lord, my sweetest liberty is obedience to Thee; my highest freedom wearing Thy yoke; my greatest rest bearing Thy burden. O, how love I Thy Law after the inward man! I delight to do Thy will, O my God! The Lord grant unto us that we “being *delivered* out of the hand of our enemies might *serve him* without fear, in holiness and righteousness before him, all the days of our life” (Luk 1:74-75). ❧

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The Christian’s Armor

“Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might. Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places. Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breastplate of righteousness; And your feet shod with the preparation of the

¹¹⁸ **maliciousness** – being spiteful or intentionally harmful.

¹¹⁹ **spurious** – not true or genuine; counterfeit.

¹²⁰ **lasciviousness** – expressing lust or lewdness.

gospel of peace; Above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God: Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints."

—*Ephesians 6:10-18*

IN the passage which is to be before us, Ephesians 6:10-18, the apostle gathers up the whole previous subject of the Epistle into an urgent reminder of the solemn conditions under which the Christian's life is lived. By a graphic figure he shows that the Christian's life is lived on the battlefield, for we are not only pilgrims but soldiers; we are not only in a foreign country, but in the enemy's land. Though the redemption which Christ has purchased for His people be free and full, yet, between the beginning of its application to us and the final consummation of it, there is a terrible and protracted conflict through which we have to pass. This is not merely a figure of speech, but a grim reality. Though salvation is free, yet it is not obtained without great effort. The fight to which God's children are called in this life, is one in which Christians themselves receive many sore wounds, and thousands of professors are slain. Now, as we shall see in the verses which follow, the apostle warns us that the conflict has to do with more than human foes: The enemies we have to meet are superhuman ones, and therefore, in order to successfully fight against them we need supernatural strength. We must remember that the Christian belongs to the spiritual realm as well as the natural, and so he has spiritual as well as natural foes; and hence he needs spiritual strength as well as physical. Therefore the apostle begins here by saying, "Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might" (v. 10). The word "finally" denotes that the apostle had reached his closing exhortation, and the words "be strong" link up with what immediately precedes as well as with what now follows. The whole of the fifth and the opening verses of the sixth chapters are filled with exhortations; exhortations that pertain to each aspect of the Christian life; exhortations to regulate him in the home, in business, in the world. Those exhortations are addressed to the husband, wife, child, master, servant, and in order for the Christian to obey them he needs to be "strong in the Lord and in the power of his might." Thus, the call which is given in verse 10 is not only an introduction to what follows, but is also closely related to that which precedes.

1. "Be Strong in the Lord"

"Finally, my brethren"—after all the Christian duties I have set before you in the previous verse, now—"be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might." The words "be strong" mean to muster strength for the conflict, and be strong "in the Lord" signifies we must seek that strength from the only source from which we can obtain it. Note carefully it is not "be strong from the Lord," nor is it "be strengthened by the Lord." No, it is "be strong in the Lord." Perhaps you will get the thought if I use this analogy: just as a thumb that is amputated is useless, and just as a branch cut off from the vine withers, so

a Christian whose fellowship with the Lord has been broken, is in a strengthless, fruitless, useless state. Thus, “be strong in the Lord” means first of all, see to it that you maintain a live practical relationship to and remain in constant communion with the Lord. Just as my arm must be a part of, a member in, my body, if it is to be vitalized and fitted to perform its functions, so I must be in real touch with the Lord, in daily communion with Him, in living contact—not in theory, but in actual experience. It is deeply important that we should, ere we proceed, grasp the exhortation found in verse 10; otherwise there will be no strength for the conflict. “Be strong in the Lord and in the power of his might.” At first sight there seems to be a needless repetition there; but it is not so. A soldier not only needs strength of body for that carrying of his heavy weapons, for that strain of long marches, and for that actual fighting, but he also needs courage; a powerful giant who is a coward would make no sort of soldier. The two chief things which are needed for one engaged in fighting are strength and courage, or vitality and a brave heart; and that is what is in view in verse 10—the last clause brings in the thought of boldness. “Be strong”: in faith, in hope, in wisdom, in patience, in fortitude, in every Christian grace. To be strong in grace is to be weak in sin. It is vitally essential to remember that we need to have our strength and courage renewed daily. Be strong in the Lord: seek His strength at the beginning of each day—“they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength” (Isa 40:31). God does not impart strength to us wholesale: He will not give me strength Monday morning to last through the week. No, there has to be the renewing of our strength, and that strength has to be drawn from the Lord by the actings of faith, appropriating from His “fullness.” The enemies we have to contend with cannot be overcome by human wisdom and might. Unless we go forth to the conflict continually looking to Christ for all needed supplies of grace, deriving all our vitality from Him, we are sure to be defeated.

2. “The Armour of God”

“Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil” (v. 11). Our first need is to stir up ourselves to resist temptation by a believing reliance upon God’s all-sufficient grace, that is, obtaining from Him the strength which will enable us to go forth and fight against the foe. Our second greatest need is to be well armed for the conflict into which we must daily enter. This is the relation between verses 10 and 11: “be strong in the Lord” and “Put on the whole armour of God”: first, stir up yourselves to resist temptation, seeking strength at the beginning of the day for the conflict; then see to it that you take unto yourselves, put on, the whole armour of God.

The Christian is engaged in a warfare. There is a fight before him, hence armour is urgently needed. It is impossible for us to stand against the wiles of the devil unless we avail ourselves of the provisions which God has made for enabling us to stand. Observe it is called “the armour of God”: just as the strength we need, comes not from ourselves, but must be supplied by the Lord; so our means of defense lie not in our own powers and faculties, but only as they are quickened by God. It is called the “armour of God” because

He both provides and bestows it, for we have none of our own; and yet, while this armour is of God's providing and bestowing, we have to "put it on"! God does not fit it on us; He places it before us; and it is our responsibility, duty, task, to put on the whole armour of God. I must say that this same figure of "the armour" is used three times in the epistles of Paul, and I believe we find in them a reference to the Trinity. I think the "armour of righteousness" (2Co 6:7) looks more particularly unto Christ; the "armour of light" (Rom 13:12) more especially to the Holy Spirit, Who is the One that immediately illuminates us; and the "armour of God" unto the Father, Who is the Provider of it.

Now it is very important that we should recognize that this term "armour" is a figurative one, a metaphor, and refers not to something which is material or carnal. It is a figurative expression denoting the Christian's graces: the various parts of this armour represent the different spiritual graces which are to protect his varied faculties; and when we are told to "put on" the armour, it simply means we are to call into exercise and action our graces. Notice, "Put on the whole armour of God," that is, avoiding the snares of the devil; or to drop the figure, so exercise all the Christian graces that no part of the soul is exposed unto the enemy. Those who wish to approve themselves of being in possession of grace, must see to it that they have all the graces of a saint. "Wherefore, take unto you the graces of a saint." "Wherefore, take unto you the whole armour of God, that (in order that) ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil." There is no standing against him if we are not armoured; or to drop the figure, there is no success in resisting the devil if our graces be not in exercise. On the other hand, there is no failing and falling before him if our graces are healthy and active.

"For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places" (v. 12). The opening "For" has the force of "Because": the apostle is advancing a reason, which virtually amounts to an argument, so as to enforce the exhortation just given. Because we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, not against puny human enemies no stronger than ourselves, but against powers and rulers and of the darkness of this world: therefore the panoply¹²¹ of God is essential. That is brought in to emphasize the terribleness of the conflict before us. It is no imaginary one, and no ordinary foes we have to meet; but spiritual, superhuman, invisible ones. Those enemies seek to destroy faith and produce doubt. They seek to destroy hope and produce despair. They seek to destroy humility and produce pride. They seek to destroy peace and produce bitterness and malice. They seek to prevent our enjoyment of heavenly things. Their attack is not upon the body, but upon the soul.

3. "Stand"

"Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand" (v. 13). The opening "Wherefore" means, in

¹²¹ **panoply** – a complete suit of armor.

view of the fact that we wrestle against these powerful superhuman, invisible foes, who hate us with a deadly hatred and are seeking to destroy us; therefore appropriate and use the provision which God has made, so that we may stand and withstand. The first clause of verse 13 explains the opening words of verse 11. Verse 11 says “put on”, make use of all proper defenses and weapons for repulsing the attacks and the 13th says “take unto you the whole armour of God”: we “put on” by taking it “unto us,” that is, by appropriation, by making it our own. “That ye may be able to withstand”: to withstand is the opposite of yielding, of being tripped up, thrown down, by the devil’s temptations; it means that we stand our ground, strive against and resist the devil. “That ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand”: the “stand” is the opposite of a slothful sleep or a cowardly flight. We have that illustrated in the case of the apostles. In Gethsemane they did not “stand,” but lay down and slept at the post of duty. No wonder that a little later they all “forsook Him and fled”!

I want you to notice that we are not here told to advance. We are only ordered to “stand.” God has not called His people to an aggressive war upon Satan, to invade his territory, and seek to wrest from him what is his; but He has told us to occupy the ground which He has allotted us. I want you to see what would have been implied had this verse said “take unto you the whole armour of God, and advance upon the devil, storm his strongholds, liberate his prisoners.” But not so: the Lord has give no charge or commission to the rank and file of His people to engage in what is now called “personal work,” “soul winning,” “rescuing the perishing.”

Indeed He has not: the work of preaching the Gospel belongs alone unto His own personally called and divinely equipped servants or ministers. All such feverish activities of the flesh as we now behold in the religious world, find no place in the divine exhortation “having done all, to stand.” This is the third time in these verses the Spirit of God has repeated that word “Stand”-not advance, not rush hither and thither, like a crazy person. “Stand therefore” is all God has told us to do in our conflict with the devil. “Stand, therefore, having your loins girt about with truth.”

Now that brings before us the first of the seven pieces of the Christian’s armour which is mentioned in this passage. First, let me warn you against the carnalization¹²² of this word, thinking of something that is external, visible, or tangible. The figure of the “girdle” is taken from a well known custom in Oriental countries, where the people all wear long flowing outer garments reaching to the feet, which would impede their actions, when walking, working or fighting. The first thing a person does there when about to be active, is to gird up around his waist that outer garment which trails to the ground. When the garment is not girded and hangs down, it indicates the person is at rest. To “gird up” is therefore the opposite of sloth and ease, following the line of least resistance. Be girded about with a girdle of truth: I believe there is a double reference or meaning

¹²² **carnalization** – attributing to something a material body.

here in the word “truth.” But first of all, I want to take up what it is that we need to “gird.”

4. “The Girdle of Truth”

The breastplate is for the heart, the helmet for the head, what then, is the “girdle” for? In that from which the figure is borrowed, the reference is to the waist or loins. But what does that metaphor denote? Plainly, the center or mainspring of all our activities. And what is that? Obviously, it is the mind. The mind is the mainspring of action: first the thought, and then the carrying out of it. First Peter 1:13 helps us here: “gird up the loins of your mind.” “Let your loins be girt about with truth”: it is not so much our embracing the truth, as the truth embracing us. Thus, the spiritual reference is to the holding in and regulation of the thoughts of the mind. The mind “girded up” means a mind which is disciplined; the opposite of one where the thoughts are allowed to run loose and wild. Again; the “loins” are the place of strength, so is the mind. If we allow our thoughts and imaginations to run wild, we will have no communion with God, and no power against Satan. If our thoughts are not brought into captivity, in obedience to Christ, the devil will soon gain a hold over us.

“Having your loins girt about with truth.” I think the word “truth” has reference, in the first place, to the Word of God: “thy word is truth” (Joh 17:17): That is what must regulate the mind, control the thoughts, subdue the imaginations: there must be a knowledge of faith in, love for, subjection to, God’s Word. “Stand, therefore, having your loins (your mind) girt about with truth.” Now that suggests to us the characteristic quality of the adversary against whom we are called upon to arm. Satan is a liar, and we can only meet him with the truth. Satan prevails over ignorance by means of guile or deceit; but he has no power over those whose minds are regulated by the truth of God. “If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed; and ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free” (Joh 8:31-32)—“free” from the toils, the power, the deceptions of Satan.

I think the word “truth” here has a second meaning. Take for example Psalm 51:6, “God desireth truth in the inward parts”: “truth” there signifies reality, sincerity. Truth is the opposite of hypocrisy, pretense, unreality. That is why the girdle of truth comes first, because if it be lacking, everything else is vain and useless. The strength of every grace lies in the sincerity of it. In 1 Timothy 1:5 we read of “faith unfeigned,” which means true, genuine, real faith; in contrast from a faith which is only theoretical, notional, lifeless, inoperative—a faith which utterly withers before the fires of testing.

“Grace be with all them that love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity” (Eph 6:24). That is another discriminating verse, distinguishing between a real and false love, a true and faithless love. There are thousands of Protestants who have a similar love for Christ as Romanists have for His mother, Mary; it is merely a natural love, a fleshly sentiment, a carnal emotion. But genuine, spiritual love for Him, strives to please Him: it is an intensely practical thing, a principle of holy obedience. O how we need to examine our

graces and test them by Scripture, to see whether our faith and love be genuine. We repeat that reality and sincerity is the strength of every Christian grace. That is why the girdle of truth comes first in the different pieces of armour.

The girdle of truth (corresponding to the military belt of the warrior) signifies, then, the mind being regulated by the Word of God, and guarded by a real sincerity; and this alone will protect us against Satan's temptations unto slackness, of guile and hypocrisy. Only as this is "put on" by us, shall we be able to "stand against the wiles of the devil": to "stand" is to so "resist" him that he does not throw us down. To "put on" the girdle of truth means applying the Word to the first movements of our minds. This is where Eve failed: she had received the Word, but not in the love of it. Instead of resisting the devil, she parleyed¹²³ with him. Instead of the truth bridling her imaginations and desire, she cast it from her. How different with Christ! When Satan approached Him, He was girded with the girdle of truth: His thoughts were regulated by the Word, and there was an absolute sincerity Godwards.

5. "Breastplate of Righteousness"

The second part or piece of the Christian's armour is mentioned in verse 14: "and having on the breastplate of righteousness." First of all, notice the connecting "and," which intimates that there is a very close relation between the mind being girded with truth and the heart protected with the breastplate of righteousness. All of these seven pieces of armour are not so connected, but the "and" here between the first two denotes that they are inseparably united. Now, obviously, the breastplate of righteousness is that protection which we need for the heart. This verse is closely parallel to Proverbs 4:23. "Keep thine heart with all diligence," understanding the "heart" to be the affections and conscience.

As there was a double reference in the word "truth," first to the Word of God, and second to sincerity of spirit, so I believe there is a double reference here in "the breastplate of righteousness." I think it refers to that righteousness which Christ wrought out for us, and that righteousness which the Spirit works in us; both the righteousness which is imputed¹²⁴ and the righteousness which is imparted¹²⁵; which is what we need if we are to withstand the attacks of Satan. We might compare 1 Thessalonians 5:8, "let us, who are of the day, be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love." I have been quite impressed of late in noting how frequently that word "sober" occurs in the Epistles, either in its substantive or verbal form. Soberness is that which should characterize and identify the people of God. It is the opposite of that superficial flightiness, which is one of the outstanding marks of worldlings today. It is the opposite of levity, and also of that feverish restlessness of the flesh, by which so many are intoxicated religiously and

¹²³ **parleyed** – had a conference or discussion with.

¹²⁴ **imputed** – credited to one's account; attributed to one.

¹²⁵ **imparted** – given a share or portion of; infused.

every other way. "But let us, who are of the day, be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love." Here, of course, it has the secondary meaning of what is in view in Ephesians 6:14; it is the practical righteousness, like what we find in Revelation 19:8.

This second piece of armour, as I have said, is inseparably connected with the girdle of truth, for sincerity of mind and holiness of heart must go together. It is in vain we pretend to the former, if the latter be lacking. Where there is genuine sincerity of mind, there will be and is, holiness of heart. To put on the breastplate of righteousness means to maintain the power of holiness over our affections and conscience! A verse that helps us to understand this is Acts 24:16, "Herein do I exercise myself, to have always a conscience void of offense toward God and men." There you have an illustration of a man taking unto himself, putting on, "the breastplate of righteousness." Paul exercised himself to maintain a good conscience, both Godward and manward and that requires daily diligence and persistent effort. Now the breastplate of righteousness is for withstanding Satan's temptations unto unholiness. The girdle of truth is to meet Satan's evil suggestions to defile the mind; the breastplate of righteousness is needed to foil his efforts to corrupt the affections or defile the conscience. Where there is a conscience which reproaches us, then we soon fall victims to other attacks of the devil.

6. "Preparation of the Gospel of Peace"

Passing on to the third piece of armour: "And your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace" (v. 15). This is perhaps the most difficult of the seven pieces of armour to understand and define; and yet, if we hold fast the first thought, that the Holy Spirit is using a figure of speech here, that the reference is to that which is internal rather than external, spiritual rather than material, and also that He is following a logical order, there should not be much difficulty in ascertaining what is meant by sandals of peace. Just as the girdle of truth has to do with the mind, the breastplate of righteousness with the heart, so the shoes for the feet are a figure of that which concerns the will. At first sight that may sound far-fetched and yet if we will think for a moment it should be obvious that what the feet are to the body, the will is to the soul. The feet carry the body from place to place, and the will is that which directs the activities of the soul; what the will decides, that is what we do.

Now the will is to be regulated by the peace of the Gospel. What is meant by that? This, in becoming reconciled to God and in having goodwill to our fellows, the Gospel is the means or instrument that God uses. We are told in Psalm 110:3 "Thy people shall be willing in the day of thy power": that means far more than they shall be ready to harken to and believe the glad tidings of the Gospel. There is brought over into the Gospel, substantially, everything which was contained in both the moral and ceremonial Law. The Gospel is not only a message of good news, but a divine commandment and rule of conduct: "For the time is come that judgment must (not 'shall'—now, not in the future!) begin at the house of God, and if it first begin at us, what shall be the end of them that obey not the gospel of God?" (1Pe 4:17). Yes, the Gospel is a rule to submit unto, a divine

fiat which demands obedience: “your professed subjection unto the gospel of Christ” (2Co 9:13). Those words are absolutely meaningless today in nine circles out of ten throughout Christendom, for the “Gospel” does not signify anything to them except “glad tidings”—there is nothing to be in “subjection to”! This is partly what I have in mind when saying there is carried over into and embodied in the Gospel the substance of everything which was found in the Law. Let me put it in another form: all the exhortations contained in the New Testament Epistles are nothing more than explanations and applications of the Ten Commandments.

The Gospel requires us to deny ourselves, take up the cross daily, and follow Christ in the path of unreserved obedience to God. “Your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace” signifies, with alacrity and readiness respond to God’s will. The peace of “the Gospel” comes from walking in subjection to its terms and by fulfilling the duties which it prescribes. Just so far as we are obedient to it, we experimentally enjoy its peace. Thus, this third piece of armour is for fortifying the will against Satan’s temptations unto self-will and disobedience, and this, by subjection to the Gospel. Just as the feet are the members which convey the body from place to place, so the will directs the soul; and just as the feet must be adequately shod if we are to walk properly and comfortably, so the will must be brought into subjection unto the revealed will of God if we are to enjoy His peace.

Let there be that complete surrender daily, the dedicating of ourselves to God, and then we will be impervious unto Satan’s attacks and temptations to disobedience. Just as the girdle of truth is to protect us from Satan’s efforts to fill the imaginations, just as the breastplate of righteousness is God’s provision to protect us from Satan’s efforts to corrupt our hearts and produce that which is unholy; so having our feet shod with the preparation of the Gospel of peace means, the will being brought into subjection to God, and that protects us from Satan’s temptations unto disobedience.

7. “Shield of Faith”

You will notice when we come to the fourth piece of armour, the “and” is lacking. The first three were joined together, for that which is denoted by those figurative terms is inseparably linked together—the mind, the heart, the will; there you have the complete inner man. “Above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked” (v. 16) I think the words “above all” have a double force. First, literally understanding them as a preposition of place, meaning over-all, shielding as a canopy, protecting the mind, heart, and will. There must be faith in exercise, if those three parts of our inner being are to be guarded. Second, “above all” may be taken adverbially, signifying, chiefly, preeminently, supremely. It is an essential thing that you should take the shield of faith, for Hebrews 11:6 tells us, “But without faith it is impossible to please him.” Yes, even if there were sincerity, love, and a pliable will, yet without faith we could not please Him. Therefore, “above all” take unto you the shield of faith.

Faith is all in all in resisting temptations. We must be fully persuaded of the divine inspiration of the Scriptures if we are to be awed by their precepts and cheered by their encouragements; we will never heed properly the divine warnings or consolations, unless we have explicit confidence in their divine authorship. The whole victory is here ascribed to faith "above all": it is not by the breastplate, helmet, or sword, but by the shield of faith that we are enabled to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked. It seems to be a general principle in the Spirit's arrangement of things in Scripture to put the most vital one in the center: we have seven pieces of armour, and the Shield of Faith is the fourth! So in Hebrews 6:4-6 we have five things mentioned, and in the middle is, "made partakers of the Holy Spirit."

Faith is the life of all the graces. If faith be not in exercise, love, hope, patience cannot be. Here we find faith is likened unto a "shield," because it is intended for the defense of the whole man. The shield of the soldier is something he grips, and raises or lowers as it is needed. It is for the protection of his entire person. Now the figure which the Holy Spirit uses here in connection with Satan's attacks, is taken from one of the devices of the ancients in their warfare, namely, the use of darts which had been dipped in tar and set on fire, in order to blind their foes: that is what lies behind the metaphor of "quench all the fiery darts of the wicked"; what is in view is Satan's efforts to prevent our looking upward!

The attacks of the devil are likened to "fiery darts," first, because of the wrath with which he shoots them. There is intense hatred in Satan against the child of God. Again; the very essence of his temptations is to inflame the passions and distress the conscience. He aims to enkindle covetousness, to excite worldly ambition, to ignite our lust. In James 3:6 we read, "the tongue...is set on fire of hell"-that means the devil's "fiery darts" have affected it. The third reason why his temptations are likened unto "fiery darts" is because of the end to which they lead if not quenched; should Satan's temptations be followed out to the end, they would land us in the lake of fire. The figure of "darts" denotes that his temptations are swift, noiseless, dangerous. Now taking the shield of faith means, appropriating the Word and acting on it. The shield is to protect the whole person, wherever the attack be made, whether on spirit, or soul, or body; and there is that in the Word which is exactly suited unto each, but faith must lay hold of and employ it. Now in order to use the shield of faith effectually the Word of Christ needs to dwell in us "richly" (Col 3:16). We must have right to hand a word which is pertinent for the particular temptation presented. For example, if tempted unto covetousness, I must use "Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth" (Mat 6:19); when solicited by evil companions, "if sinners entice thee, consent thou not" (Pro 1:10); if tempted to harshness, "Be kindly affectioned one to another" (Rom 12:10). It is because the details of Scripture have so little place in our meditations that Satan trips us to frequently. "Above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked." Like most of the other terms used, "faith" here also has a double signification. The faith which is to be our "shield" is both an objective and a sub-

jective one. It has reference, first, to the Word of God without, the authority of which is ever binding upon me. It points, secondly, to my confidence in that Word, the heart going out in trustful expectation to the Author of it, and counting upon its efficacy to repulse the devil.

8. “Helmet of Salvation”

“And take the helmet of salvation” (v. 17). This is the fifth piece of the Christian’s armour. First of all we may note the link between the fourth and fifth pieces denoted by the word “and,” for this helps us to define what the “helmet of salvation” is; it is linked with faith! Hebrews 11:1 tells us, “faith is the substance of things hoped for,” and if we compare 1 Thessalonians 5:8 we get a confirmation of that thought: “But let us who are of the day be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love, and for a helmet the hope of salvation.” Here in Thessalonians, then, we have “hope” directly connected with “the helmet.”

Incidentally, this verse is one of many in the New Testament which puts salvation in the future rather than in the past! Hope always looks forward, having to do with things to come; as Romans 8:25 tells us, “if we hope for that we see not, then do we with patience wait for it.” Now faith and hope are inseparable: they are one in birth, one in decay. If faith languish, hope is listless.

By the helmet of salvation, then, I understand the heart’s expectation of the good things promised, a well-grounded assurance that God will make good to His people those things which His Word presents for future accomplishment. We might link up with this 1 John 3:3—scriptural hope purifies. It delivers from discontent and despair; it comforts the heart in the interval of waiting. Satan is unable to get a Christian to commit many of the grosser sins which are common in the world, so he attacks along other lines. Often he seeks to cast a cloud of gloom over the soul, or produce anxiety about the future. Despondency is one of his favorite weapons, for he knows well that “the joy of the Lord” is our “strength” (Neh 8:10), hence his frequent efforts to dampen our spirits. To repulse these, we are to “take the helmet of salvation”: that is, we are to exercise hope—anticipate the blissful future, look forward unto the eternal rest awaiting us; look away from earth to heaven!

9. “Sword of the Spirit”

“And the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God” (v. 17). God has provided His people with an offensive weapon as well as defensive ones. At first sight that may seem to clash with what we said about Christians not being called upon to be aggressive against Satan, seeking to invade his territory and wrest it from him. But this verse does not clash to the slightest degree. 2 Corinthians 7:1 gives us the thought: “Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit”: that is the active, aggressive side of the Christian’s warfare. We are not only to resist our lusts but to subdue them. It is significant to note how late the “sword of the

spirit” is mentioned in this list. Some have thought that it should have come first, but it is not mentioned until the sixth. Why? I believe there is a twofold reason. First, because all the other graces that have been mentioned are necessary in order to make a right use of the Word. If there is not a sincere mind and a holy heart we shall only handle the Word dishonestly. If there is not practical righteousness, then we shall only be handling the Word theoretically. If there is not faith and hope we shall only misuse it. All the Christian graces that are figuratively contemplated under the other pieces of armour must be in exercise before we can profitably handle the Word of God. Second, it teaches us that, even when the Christian has attained unto the highest point possible in this life, he still needs the Word. Even when he has upon him the girdle of truth, the breastplate of righteousness, his feet shod with the shoes of the preparation of the Gospel of peace, and has taken unto himself the shield of faith and the helmet of salvation, he still needs the Word!

The Word of God is here called “the sword of the spirit” because He is the Author, the Interpreter, and the Applier of it. He is the only One that can give it power over us. We can handle the Word, meditate upon it, pray over it, and it has no effect upon us whatsoever, unless the Spirit applies His sword! If you think of this verse in the light of Christ’s temptation, you will find that He used that sword for self-defense in repulsing the assaults of the devil: He was not aggressively attacking him! And blessed, too, is to mark that, as the dependent Man, He used that weapon in the power of “the Spirit”: see Matthew 4:1, Luke 4:14.

10. “Praying Always”

The last piece of armour is given in verse 18, “Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints.” Prayer is that which alone gives us the necessary strength to use the other pieces of armour! After the Christian has taken unto himself those six pieces, before he is thoroughly furnished to go forth unto battle and fitted for victory, he needs the help of his General. For this, the apostle bids us to pray “always” with all supplication of the Spirit. We are to fight upon our knees! Only prayer can keep alive the different spiritual graces which are figured by the various pieces of armour. “Praying always”: in every season—in times of joy as well as sorrow, in days of adversity as well as prosperity. Not only so, but “watching thereunto with all perseverance”: that is one of the essential elements in prevailing prayer—persistency. Watch yourself that you do not let up, become slack or discouraged. Keep on! The 18th verse is as though the apostle said, “Forget not to seek unto the God of this “armour,” and make humble supplication for His assistance; for only He Who has given us these arms can enable us to make a successful use of them. Some have called it the “all verse.” “Praying always with all prayer...with all perseverance, and supplication for all saints”! Think not only of yourself, but also of your fellow-soldiers who are engaged in the same conflict!

Question: what does the 12th verse mean? Answer: it does not refer to the sphere or place where the “wrestling” itself is done, but emphasizes the fact that the foes which attack the Christian are super-human. We are not to interpret that verse by the language of earth’s geography; it does not say, “for we wrestle in high places against principalities and powers.” No, the high places are connected with those who attack the Christian, and not with the place where the wrestling is done. ❧

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Godly Companions

*“I am a companion of all that fear thee, and of them that keep thy precepts.”
—Psalm 119:63*

In the above verse we have a description of God’s people according to the course of their lives and conduct. They are a people marked by two things: fear and submission, the latter being the fruit of the former. Regenerated souls obey God conscientiously out of reverence to His majesty and goodness, and from a due regard of His will as made known in His Word. The same description is given of them in Acts 10:35, “In every nation he that feareth God and worketh righteousness is accepted with him.” It is a filial fear which is awed by God’s greatness and is careful not to offend Him, which is constrained by His love and is anxious to please Him. Such are the only ones fit to be a Christian’s “companions.”

A “companion” is, properly speaking, one whom I choose to walk and converse with in a way of friendship. Inasmuch as the companions we select is an optional matter, it is largely true that a person may be known by the company he or she keeps; hence the old adage, “Birds of a feather flock together.” Scripture asks the searching question, “Can two walk together, except they be agreed?” (Amo 3:3). A Christian, before his conversion, was controlled by the Prince of darkness and walked according to the course of this world (Eph 2:2-3), and therefore did he seek and enjoy the company of worldlings. But when he was born again the new nature within him prompted new tastes and desires, and so he seeks a new company, delighting only in the saints of God. Alas, that we do not always continue as we began.

The Christian is to have good will toward all with whom he comes in contact, desiring and seeking their best interests (Gal 6:10), but he is not to be yoked to (2Co 6:14) nor have any fellowship with (Eph 5:11) those who are unbelievers, nor is he to delight

in or have complacency toward those who despise his Master. "Shouldest thou help the ungodly, and love them that hate the Lord?" (2Ch 19:2). Would you knowingly take a viper into your bosom? "The wicked is an abomination unto the righteous" (Pro 29:27). So said David, "Do not I hate them, O Lord, that hate thee? and am I not grieved with those that rise up against thee? I hate them with a perfect hatred: I count them mine enemies" (Psa 139:21-22). That holy man could not be confederate with such.

Evil company is to be sedulously avoided by the Christian lest he become defiled by them. "He that walketh with wise men shall be wise; but a companion of fools shall be destroyed" (Pro 13:20). Nor is it only the openly lawless and criminal who are to be shunned, but even, yea especially, those professing to be Christians yet who do not live the life of Christians. It is this latter class particularly against which the real child of God needs to be most on his guard: namely, those who say one thing and do another; those whose talk is pious, but whose walk differs little or nothing from the non-professor. The Word of God is plain and positive on this point: "Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof: from such turn away" (2Ti 3:5). This is not merely good advice, but a divine command which we disregard at our peril.

In selecting your "companions," let not a pleasing personality deceive you. The devil himself often poses as "an angel of light," and sometimes his wolfish agents disguise themselves in "sheep's clothing" (Mat 7:15). Be most careful in seeing to it that what draws you toward and makes you desire the companionship of Christian friends is their love and likeness to Christ and not their love and likeness to you. Shun as you would a deadly plague those who are not awed by the fear of God, i.e., a trembling lest they offend Him. Let not the devil persuade you that you are too well established in the faith to be injured by intimacy with worldly "Christians." "Be not deceived, evil communications corrupt good manners" (1Co 15:33). Rather "follow righteousness, faith, love, peace, with them that call on the Lord out of a pure heart" (2Ti 2:22).

"Be not deceived: evil communications corrupt good manners" (1Co 15:33). The Greek word here for "communications" properly means "a bringing together, companionships." And evil companionships "corrupt." All evil is contagious and association with evildoers, whether they be "church members" or open infidels, has a defiling and debasing effect upon the true child of God. Mark well how the Holy Spirit has prefaced this warning: "be not deceived." Evidently there is a real danger of God's people imagining that they can play with fire without getting burned. Not so; God has not promised to protect us when we fly in the face of his danger signals. Observe too the next verse which is inseparably connected with the one to which we have directed attention. "Awake to righteousness and sin not; for some have not the knowledge of God: I speak [this] to your shame" (1Co 15:34). The word "awake" signifies to arouse as from a torpor or state of lethargy. It is a call to shake off the delusive spell that a Christian may company with Christ-less companions without being contaminated by them. "And sin not" in this respect. To cultivate friendship with religious worldlings is *sin*, for such "have not the knowledge of God": they have no experimental acquaintance with Him, His fear is not on

them, His authority has no weight with them. "I speak [this] to your shame." The child of God ought to be abashed and filled with confusion that he needs such a word as this.

"I am a companion of all that fear thee, and of them that keep thy precepts." Such are the only "companions" worth having, the only ones who will give you any encouragement to continue pressing forward along the "Narrow Way." It is not those who merely pretend to "believe" God's precepts, or profess to "stand for" them, but those who actually "keep" them. But where are such to be found these days? Ah, where indeed. They are but "few" in number (Mat 7:14) one here and one there. Yea, so very "few" are they that we are constrained to cry, "Help, Lord, for the godly man ceaseth; for the faithful fail from among the children of men" (Psa 12:1).

It is indeed solemn to read the words that immediately follow the last-quoted scripture and find how aptly they apply to and how accurately they describe the multitude of godless professing "Christians" all around us: "they speak vanity every one with his neighbour, with flattering lips, with a double heart do they speak" (v. 2). Note three things about them. First, they "speak vanity" or "emptiness." Their words are like bubbles, there is nothing edifying about them. It cannot be otherwise for "out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh" (Mat 12:34). Their poor hearts are empty (Mat 12:44). So their speech is empty too. Second, they have "flattering lips," which is the reason why they are so popular with the ungodly. They will seek to puff you up with a sense of their own importance, pretend to admire the "much light" you have, and tell you it is your duty to "give it out to others." Third, they have a "double heart." They are (vainly) seeking to serve two masters: (cf. 2Ki 17:32-33).

"I am a companion of all that fear thee, and of them that keep thy precepts." There is a very real sense in which this is true even where there is no outward contact with such. Faithfulness to God, obedience to His Word, keeping His precepts, companying only with those who do so, turning away from everybody else, has always involved a lonely path. It was thus with Enoch (Jude 14). It was thus with Abraham (Isa 51:2). It was thus with Paul (2Ti 1:15). It is the same today. Every city in the land is filled with "churches," "missions," "Gospel halls," "Bible institutes," etc., but where are those who give plain evidence that they are living in this world as "strangers and pilgrims" and as such abstaining "from fleshly lusts which war against the soul" (1Pe 2:11)?

But thank God, though the path of faithfulness to Him be a lonely one, it brings me into spiritual fellowship with those who have gone before. We are to walk by faith and not by sight, and faith perceives that walking with Christ "outside the camp" (Heb 13:13) necessarily brings into communion with "all" His redeemed, be they on earth or be they in heaven. Thus the apostle John in his lonely exile on Patmos referred to himself as "your brother and companion in tribulation, and in the kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ" (Rev 1:9). Yes, Christian reader, for a little while it means companionship "in tribulation," but, praise God it will not mean enduring the throes of the swiftly-approaching portion of Christ-less professors left behind when Christ comes for His own (2Th 2:10-12). For a little while it means companionship in "the kingdom and patience

of Jesus Christ,” soon it will be in the kingdom and glory of Christ. May divine mercy so enable us to live now that in that Day we shall receive His “Well done.” ❧

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Salvation from the Pleasures of Sin

It is here that God begins His actual application of salvation unto His elect. God saves us from the pleasure or love of sin before He delivers us from the penalty or punishment of sin. Necessarily so, for it would be neither an act of holiness nor of righteousness were He to grant full pardon to one who was still a rebel against Him, loving that which He hates. God is a God of order throughout, and nothing ever more evidences the perfections of His works than the orderliness of them. And how does God save His people from the pleasure of sin? The answer is, “By imparting to them a nature which hates evil and loves holiness.” This takes place when they are born again, so that actual salvation begins with regeneration. Of course it does: where else could it commence? Fallen man can never perceive his desperate need of salvation nor come to Christ for it, till he has been renewed by the Holy Spirit.

“He hath made everything beautiful in his time” (Ecc 3:11), and much of the beauty of God’s spiritual handiwork is lost upon us unless we duly observe their “time.” Has not the Spirit Himself emphasized this in the express enumeration He has given us in “For whom he did foreknow, he did also predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover, whom he did predestinate, them he also called; and whom he called, them he also justified; and whom he justified, them he also glorified” (Rom 8:29-30). Verse 29 announces the divine foreordination; verse 30 states the manner of its actualization. It seems passing strange that with this divinely defined method before them, so many preachers begin with our justification, instead of with that effectual call (from death unto life, our regeneration) which precedes it. Surely it is most obvious that regeneration must first take place in order to lay a foundation for our justification. Justification is by faith (Act 13:39; Rom 5:1; Gal 3:8), and the sinner must be divinely quickened before he is capable of believing savingly.

Does not the last statement made throw light upon and explain what we have said is so “passing strange”? Preachers today are so thoroughly imbued with free-willism that they have departed almost wholly from that sound evangelism which marked our forefathers. The radical difference between Arminianism and Calvinism is that the system of the former revolves about the creature, whereas the system of the latter has the Creator

for its centre of orbit. The Arminian allots to man the first place; the Calvinist gives God that position of honor. Thus the Arminian begins his discussion of salvation with justification, for the sinner must believe before he can be forgiven; further back he will not go, for he is unwilling that man should be made nothing of. But the instructed Calvinist begins with election, descends to regeneration, and then shows that by being born again (by the sovereign act of God, in which the creature has no part) the sinner is made capable of savingly believing the Gospel.

The Unbeliever's First Step: A New Nature

What multitudes of people would strongly re-sent being told that they delighted in evil! They would indignantly ask if we supposed them to be moral perverts. No indeed: a person may be thoroughly chaste and yet delight in evil. It may be that some of our own readers repudiate the charge that they have ever taken pleasure in sin, and would claim on the contrary, that from earliest recollection they have detested wickedness in all its forms. Nor would we dare to call into question their sincerity; instead we point out that it only affords another exemplification of the solemn fact that "the heart is deceitful above all things" (Jer 17:9). But this is a matter that is not open to argument: the plain teaching of God's Word decides the point once and for all, and beyond its verdict there is no appeal. What, then, say the Scriptures?

So far from God's Word denying that there is any delight to be found therein, it expressly speaks of "the pleasures of sin"; it immediately warns that those pleasures are but "for a season" (Heb 11:25), for the aftermath is painful and not pleasant; yea, unless God intervenes in His sovereign grace, they entail eternal torment. So too, the Word refers to those who are "lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God" (2Ti 3:4). It is indeed striking to observe how often this discordant note is struck in Scripture. It mentions those who "love vanity" (Psa 4:2); "him that loveth violence" (Psa 11:5); "thou lovest evil more than good" (Psa 52:3); "he loved lies" (Psa 62:4); "scorners delight in their scorning" (Pro 1:22); "they which delight in their abominations" (Isa 66:3); "their abominations were according as they loved" (Hosea 9:10); "who hated the good and loved the evil" (Mic 3:2); "if any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him" (1Jo 2:15). To love sin is far worse than to commit it, for a man may be suddenly tripped up or commit it through frailty.

The fact is, my reader, that we are not only born into this world with an evil nature, but with hearts that are thoroughly in love with sin. Sin is our native element. We are wedded to our lusts, and of ourselves are no more able to alter the bent of our corrupt nature than we could change our skin color or the leopard his spots. But what is impossible with man, is possible to God (Luk 18:27), and when He takes us in hand this is where He begins—by saving us from the pleasure or love of sin. This is the great miracle of grace, for the Almighty stoops down and picks up a loath-some leper from the dung-hill and makes him a new creature in Christ, so that the things he once loved he now hates, and the things he once hated he now loves. God commences by saving us from

ourselves. He does not save us from the penalty until He has delivered us from the love of sin.

And how is this miracle of grace accomplished, or rather, exactly what does it consist of? Negatively, not by eradicating the evil nature, nor even by refining it. Positively, by communicating a new nature, a holy nature, which loathes that which is evil, and delights in all that is truly good. To be more specific. First, God saves His people from the pleasure or love of sin by putting His holy awe in their hearts, for “the fear of the Lord is to hate evil” (Pro 8:13), and again, “the fear of the Lord is to depart from evil” (Pro 6:6). Second, God saves His people from the pleasure of sin by communicating to them a new and vital principle: “the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit” (Rom 5:5), and where the love of God rules the heart, the love of sin is dethroned. Third, God saves His people from the love of sin by the Holy Spirit’s drawing their affections unto things above, thereby taking them off the things which formerly enthralled them.

The Believer’s Struggle

If on the one hand the unbeliever hotly denies that he is in love with sin, many a believer is often hard put to persuade himself that he has been saved from the love thereof. With an understanding that has in part been enlightened by the Holy Spirit, he is the better able to discern things in their true colors. With a heart that has been made honest by grace, he refuses to call sweet bitter. With a conscience that has been sensitized by the new birth, he the more quickly feels the workings of sin and the hankering of his affections for that which is forbidden. Moreover, the flesh remains in him, unchanged, and as the raven constantly craves carrion, so this corrupt principle in which our mothers conceived us, lusts after and delights in that which is the opposite of holiness. It is these things which occasion and give rise to the disturbing questions that clamour for answer within the genuine believer.

The sincere Christian is often made to seriously doubt if he has been delivered from the love of sin. Such questions as these plainly agitate his mind: “Why do I so readily yield to temptation? Why do some of the vanities and pleasures of the world still possess so much attraction for me? Why do I chafe so much against any restraints being placed upon my lusts? Why do I find the work of mortification (Rom 8:13) so difficult and distasteful? Could such things as these be if I were a new creature in Christ? Could such horrible experiences as these happen if God had saved me from taking pleasure in sin?” Well do we know that we are here giving expression to the very doubts which exercise the minds of many of our readers, and those who are strangers thereto are to be pitied. But what shall we say in reply? How is this distressing problem to be resolved?

The Believer’s Assurance

How may one be assured that he has been saved from the love of sin? Let us point out first that the presence of that within us which still lusts after and takes delight in some evil things, is not incompatible with our having been saved from the love of sin,

paradoxical as that may sound. It is part of the mystery of the Gospel that those who be saved are yet sinners in themselves. The point we are here dealing with is similar to and parallel with faith. The divine principle of faith in the heart does not cast out unbelief. Faith and doubts exist side by side with a quickened soul, which is evident from those words, "Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief" (Mar 9:24). In like manner the Christian may exclaim and pray, "Lord, I long after holiness, help Thou my lustings after sin." And why is this? Because of the existence of two separate natures, the one at complete variance with the other within the Christian.

How, then, is the presence of faith to be ascertained? Not by the ceasings of unbelief, but by discovering its own fruit and works. Fruit may grow amid thorns as flowers among weeds, and yet it is fruit nonetheless. Faith exists amid many doubts and fears. Notwithstanding opposing forces within as well as from without us, faith still reaches out after God. Notwithstanding innumerable discouragements and defeats, faith continues to fight. Notwithstanding many refusals from God, it yet clings to Him and says, "I will not let thee go, except thou bless me" (Gen 32:26). Faith may be fearfully weak and fitful, often eclipsed by the clouds of unbelief, nevertheless the devil himself cannot persuade its possessor to repudiate God's Word, despise His Son, or abandon all hope. The presence of faith, then, may be ascertained in that it causes its possessor to come before God as an empty-handed beggar beseeching Him for mercy and blessing.

The Believer's Salvation from the Love of Sin

Now just as the presence of faith may be known amid all the workings of unbelief, so our salvation from the love of sin may be ascertained notwithstanding all the lustings of the flesh after that which is evil. But in what way? How is this initial aspect of salvation to be identified? We have already anticipated this question in an earlier paragraph, wherein we stated that God saved us from delighting in sin by imparting a nature that hates evil and loves holiness, which takes place at the new birth. Consequently, the real question to be settled is, "How may the Christian positively determine whether that new and holy nature has been imparted to him?" The answer is, "By observing its activities, particularly the opposition it makes (under the energizings of the Holy Spirit) unto indwelling sin." Not only does the flesh (the principle of sin) lust against the spirit, but the spirit (the principle of holiness) lusts and wars against the flesh (Gal 5:17).

1. Sin becomes a burden.

First, our salvation from the pleasure or love of sin may be recognized by sin's becoming a burden to us. This is truly a spiritual experience. Many souls are loaded down with worldly anxieties, who know nothing of what it means to be bowed down with a sense of guilt. But when God takes us in hand, the iniquities and transgressions of our past life are made to lie as an intolerable load upon the conscience. When we are given a sight of ourselves as we appear before the eyes of the thrice holy God, we will exclaim with the Psalmist, "For innumerable evils have compassed me about: mine iniquities have taken hold upon me, so that I am not able to look up; they are more than the hairs of mine head: therefore my heart faileth me" (Psa 40:12). So far from sin being pleasant,

it is now felt as a cruel incubus, a crushing weight, and unendurable load. The soul is “heavy laden” (Mat 11:28) and bowed down. A sense of guilt oppresses and the conscience cannot bear the weight of it. Nor is this experience restricted to our first conviction: it continues with more or less acuteness throughout the Christian’s life.

2. Sin becomes bitter.

Second, our salvation from the pleasure of sin may be recognized by sin’s becoming bitter to us. True, there are millions of unregenerate who are filled with remorse over the harvest reaped from their sowing of wild oats. Yet that is not hatred of sin, but dislike of its consequences—ruined health, squandered opportunities, financial straitness, or social disgrace. No, what we have reference to is that anguish of heart which ever marks the one the Spirit takes in hand. When the veil of delusion is removed and we see sin in the light of God’s countenance; when we are given a discovery of the depravity of our very nature, then we perceive that we are sunk in carnality and death. When sin is opened to us in all its secret workings, we are made to feel the vileness of our hypocrisy, self-righteousness, unbelief, impatience, and the utter filthiness of our hearts. And when the penitent soul views the sufferings of Christ, he can say with Job, “God maketh my heart soft” (23:16).

Ah, my reader, it is this experience which prepares the heart to go out after Christ: those that are whole need not a physician, but they that are quickened and convicted by the Spirit are anxious to be relieved by the great Physician. “The Lord killeth, and maketh alive; he bringeth down to the grave, and bringeth up. The Lord maketh poor, and maketh rich; he bringeth low, and lifteth up” (1Sa 2:6-7). It is in this way that God slayeth our self-righteousness, maketh poor and bringeth low—by making sin to be an intolerable burden and as bitter wormwood to us. There can be no saving faith till the soul is filled with evangelical repentance, and repentance is a godly sorrow for sin, a holy detestation of sin, a sincere purpose to forsake it. The Gospel calls upon men to repent of their sins, forsake their idols, and mortify their lusts, and thus it is utterly impossible for the Gospel to be a message of good tidings to those who are in love with sin and madly determined to perish rather than part with their idols.

Nor is this experience of sin’s becoming bitter to us limited to our first awakening—it continues in varying degrees, to the end of our earthly pilgrimage. The Christian suffers under temptations, is pained by Satan’s fiery assaults, and bleeds from the wounds inflicted by the evil he commits. It grieves him deeply that he makes such a wretched return unto God for His goodness, that he requites Christ so evilly for His dying love, that he responds so fitfully to the promptings of the Spirit. The wanderings of his mind when he desires to meditate upon the Word, the dullness of his heart when he seeks to pray, the worldly thoughts which invade his mind on the Holy Sabbath, the coldness of his affections towards the Redeemer, cause him to groan daily; all of which goes to evidence that sin has been made bitter to him. He no longer welcomes those intruding thoughts which take his mind off God: rather does he sorrow over them. But, “Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted” (Mat 5:4).

3. Sin produces felt bondage.

Third, our salvation from the pleasure of sin may be recognized by the felt bondage which sin produces. As it is not until a divine faith is planted in the heart that we become aware of our native and inveterate unbelief, so it is not until God saves us from the love of sin that we are conscious of the fetters it has placed around us. Then it is we discover that we are “without strength” (Rom 5:6), unable to do anything pleasing to God, incapable of running the race set before us (Heb 12:1). A divinely drawn picture of the saved soul’s felt bondage is to be found in Romans 7: “For I know that in me [that is, in my flesh] dwelleth no good thing: for to will is present with me, but how to perform that which is good I find not. For the good that I would, I do not; but the evil which I would not, that I do...For I delight in the law of God after the inward man: but I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin” (vs. 18-19, 22-23). And what is the sequel? This, the agonizing cry, “O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?” (vs. 24). If that be the sincere lamentation of your heart, then God has saved you from the pleasure of sin.

Let it be pointed out though, that salvation from the love of sin is felt and evidenced in varying degrees by different Christians, and in different periods in the life of the same Christian, according to the measure of grace which God bestows, and according as that grace is active and operative. Some seem to have a more intense hatred of sin in all its forms than do others, yet the principle of hating sin is found in all real Christians. Some Christians, rarely if ever, commit any deliberate and premeditated sins: more often they are tripped up, suddenly tempted (to be angry or tell a lie) and are overcome. But with others the case is quite otherwise: they—fearful to say—actually plan evil acts. If anyone indignantly denies that such a thing is possible in a saint, and insists that such a character is a stranger to saving grace, we would remind him of David: was not the murder of Uriah definitely planned? This second class of Christians find it doubly hard to believe they have been saved from the love of sin. ❧

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Guarding Your Heart

Introduction ¹²⁶

“Do you think you came into this world to spend your whole time and strength in your employments, your trades, your pleasures, unto the satisfaction of the will of the flesh and of the mind? Have you time enough to eat, to drink, to sleep, to talk unprofitably—it may be corruptly—in all sorts of unnecessary societies, but have not enough time to live unto God, in the very essentials of that life? Alas, you came into the world under this law: ‘It is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment’ (Heb 9:27), and the end (purpose) why your life is here granted unto you, is that you may be prepared for that judgment. If this be neglected, if the principal part of your time be not improved with respect unto this end, you will yet fall under the sentence of it unto eternity” (John Owen, 1670).

Multitudes seem to be running, but few “pressing toward the mark;” many talk about salvation, but few experience the joy of it. There is much of the form of godliness, but little of the power of it: Oh, how rare it is to find any who know anything experimentally¹²⁷ of the power that separates from the world, delivers from self, defends from Satan, makes sin to be hated, Christ to be loved, Truth to be prized, and error and evil to be departed from. Where shall we find those who are denying self, taking up their cross daily, and following Christ in the path of obedience (Mat 16:24)? Where are they who hail reproach, welcome shame, and endure persecution? Where are they who are truly getting prayer answered daily, on whose behalf God is showing Himself strong? Something is radically wrong somewhere! Yes, and as surely as the beating of the pulse is an index to the state of our most vital physical organ, so the lives of professing Christians make it unmistakably evident that their hearts are diseased!

“For the eyes of the LORD run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to show Himself strong in the behalf of them whose heart is perfect toward Him” (2Ch 16:9). Ah, do not the opening words indicate that those with “perfect” hearts are few and far between, that they are hard to locate? Surely it does; and it has ever been the case. David cried, “Help, LORD; for the godly man ceaseth; for the faithful fail from among the children of men” (Psa 12:1). The Lord Jesus had to lament “I have laboured in vain, I have spent my strength for nought” (Isa 49:4). The Apostle Paul declared, “I have no man like-minded, who will naturally care for your state. For all seek their own, not the things which are Jesus Christ’s” (Phi 2:20, 21); “All they which are in Asia be turned away from me” (2Ti 1:15). And things are neither better nor worse today. But, my reader, instead of talking about the “apostasy of Christendom,” instead of being occupied with the empty profes-

¹²⁶ This section is taken from the July 1933 issue of *Studies in the Scriptures*.

¹²⁷ **experimentally** – known by and derived from experience.

sion all around us, what about our own hearts? Is your heart “perfect”? If so, even in these so-called “hard times,” God is “showing Himself strong” in thy behalf: that is, He is working miracles for you, and ministering to you in a way that He is not to the empty professors. But if God is not so doing, then your heart is not “perfect” toward Him, and it is high time for you to take stock and get down to serious soul business.

I. “Keep Thy Heart”

“Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life” (Pro 4:23). The pains which multitudes have taken in religion are but lost labour. Like the Pharisees of old, they have been tithing annice, mint, and cumin (Mat 23:23), but neglecting the weightier matters. Many have a zeal, but it is not according to knowledge; they are active, but their energies are misdirected; they have wrought “many wonderful works” (Mat 7:22), but they are rejected of God. Why? Because their employments are self-selected or man-appointed, while the one great task which God has assigned, is left unattended to. All outward actions are worthless while our hearts be not right with God. He will not so much as hear our prayers while we regard iniquity in our hearts (Psa 66:18)! Let us, then, endeavor to further point out what is signified by this supremely important exhortation.

A Good Conscience

To “keep” the heart signifies to have the conscience exercised about all things. In numbers of passages, “heart” and “conscience” signify one and the same thing: see 1 Samuel 24:5, 2 Samuel 24:10, 1 John 3:21, etc. The Apostle Paul declared, “herein do I exercise myself, to have always a conscience void of offense toward God, and toward men” (Act 24:16), and herein he sets before us an example which we need to emulate.

After the most careful and diligent manner we must strive to keep the conscience free from all offense in the discharge of every duty that God requires, and in rendering to every man what is due him. Though this is never perfectly attained in this life, yet every regenerate soul has a real concern for such a state of conscience. A “good conscience, in all things willing to live honestly” (Heb 13:18) is worth far more than rubies.

This is to be something more than an empty wish, which gets us nowhere. The Apostle said, “herein do I exercise myself” (Act 24:16): it was a matter of deep concern to him, and one to which he assiduously applied himself. He laboured hard in seeing to it that his conscience did not flatter, deceiving and misleading him. He was conscientious over both his outer and inner life, so that his conscience accused and condemned him not. He was more careful not to offend his conscience than he was not to displease his dearest friend. He made it his daily business to live by this rule, abstaining from many a thing which natural inclination drew him unto, and performing many a duty which the ease-loving flesh would shirk. He steadily maintained a care not to break the law of love toward either God or man. And, when conscious of failure, he saw to it that by renewed acts of repentance and faith (in confession) each offense was removed from his conscience, instead of allowing guilt to accumulate thereon.

“Now the end of the commandment is charity (love) out of a pure heart, and of a good conscience, and of faith unfeigned” (1Ti 1:5). The “commandment” is the same as the “holy commandment” of 2 Peter 2:21, namely, the Gospel—as including the Moral Law,¹²⁸ which enjoined perfect love both to God and to our neighbour. The “end” or design—that which is enjoined and whose accomplishment is prompted thereby—is love. But spiritual “love” can only proceed from “a pure heart,” that is, one which has been renewed by grace, and thereby delivered from enmity against God (Rom 8:7) and hatred against man (Ti 3:3), and cleansed from the love and pollution of sin. Spiritual “love” can only proceed out of a “good conscience,” that is, a conscience which has been made tender and active by grace, which has been purged by the blood of Christ, and which sedulously avoids all that defiles it and draws away from God; its possessor being influenced to act conscientiously in the whole of his conduct. It is solemn to note that those who “put away” a good conscience soon make “shipwreck of the faith” (1Ti 1:19).

Set the Lord Always Before Us

To “keep” the heart means to “set the Lord always before” us (Psa 16:8). Some may object that those words spoke, prophetically, of the Lord Jesus. True, but remember He has “left us an example that we should follow His steps” (1Pe 2:21). What, then, is it to “set the Lord alway before” us? It means to remember that His eye is ever upon us, and that we act accordingly. It means to remember that we must yet render to Him a full account of our stewardship, and to let this fact constantly influence us. It means that we are to ever have His honour and glory in view, living not to please ourselves but acting according to His revealed will. It means that we should strive, especially, to have God before our souls whenever we engage in any religious exercises. The Omniscient One will not be imposed upon by outward forms or empty words; they who worship Him “must worship in spirit and in truth” (Joh 4:24). “Seek ye My face”—Oh, to respond with David: “my heart said unto thee, thy face, LORD, will I seek” (Psa 27:8).

“The well is seldom so full that water will at first pumping flow forth; neither is the heart commonly so spiritual—even after our best care in our worldly converse—as to pour itself into God’s bosom freely, without something to raise and elevate it; yea, often the springs of grace lie so low, that pumping only will not fetch the heart up to a praying frame, but arguments must be poured into the soul before the affections rise” (W. Gurnall, 1660). Does not this explain why, after saying, “Bless the LORD, O my soul: and all that is within me, bless His holy name,” that the Psalmist added “Bless the LORD, O my soul” (Psa 103: 1-2)!

Ah, note well those words, dear reader: “Bless the Lord, O my soul,” and not merely by the lips. David dreaded lest, while the outward was awake, his inner man should be asleep. Are you equally careful as to this? David laboured so that no dullness and drowsiness should steal over his faculties. Therefore did he add, “and all that is within me, bless

¹²⁸ **Moral Law** – the law of God which brings conviction of sin upon every person and is a universal guide for holy living, summarized in the Ten Commandments.

His holy name”—understanding, conscience, affections, and will. Oh that we may not be guilty of that awful sin about which Christ complained, “This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoureth me with their lips; but their heart is far from me” (Mat 15:8). Again we would note the repetition in Psalm 103:2, “Bless the LORD, O my soul”: how this shows us that we need to bestir ourselves repeatedly when about to approach the Majesty on High, seeking with all our might to throw off the spirit of sloth, formality, and hypocrisy.

Watch Diligently

Of old God’s servants complained, “There is none that calleth upon thy name, that stirreth up himself to take hold of thee” (Isa 64:7). Are we any better, my friends? Do we really bestir ourselves to “take hold” of God: we shall never be like Jacob—successful “wrestlers” with Him—until we do. There is little wonder that so few obtain answers to their petitions unto the Throne of Grace: it is not simply prayer, but “the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much” (Jam 5:16). Before seeking to approach the Most High we need to “prepare” our heart (Job 11:13), and beg God to “strengthen” it (Psa 27:14), so that we may be enabled to draw near with becoming reverence and humility, so that we may trust in Him with all our hearts (Pro 3:5), love Him with all our hearts (Mat 22:37), and praise Him with “the whole heart” (Psa 9:1).

Oh the frightful impiety which is now to be witnessed on almost every side, of heedlessly rushing into the holy presence of God (or rather, going through the form of so doing), and gabbling off the first things that come to mind. And all of us are more affected by this evil spirit than we imagine, for “evil communications corrupt good manners” (1Co 15:33). We need to definitely seek grace and fight against so grievously insulting God. We need to fix our minds steadily on the august perfections of God, reminding ourselves of whom it is we are about to approach. We need to seek deliverance from that half-hearted, ill-conceived, careless and indifferent worship which is offered by so many.

We need to ponder God’s grace and goodness unto us, and lay hold of His encouraging promises, that our affections may be inflamed and our souls brought into that gracious temper which is suited unto Him to whom we owe our all.

But not only do we need to diligently watch our hearts when about to approach God in prayer or worship, but also when turning to His Holy Word. All ordinances, helps, and means of grace, are but empty shells, unless we meet with God in them; and for that, He must be sought: “Ye shall seek me, and find me, when ye shall search for me with all your heart” (Jer 29:13). We are not at all likely to obtain any more soul profit from the reading of the Scriptures than we are from the perusal of men’s writings, if we approach them in the same spirit we do human books. God’s Word is addressed unto the conscience, and it is only as we strive to have our hearts suitably affected by what we read therein, that we may justly expect to be helped spiritually.

God has bidden us, “My son, keep thy father’s commandment, and forsake not the law of thy mother: Bind them continually upon thine heart, and tie them about thy neck” (Pro 6:20, 21). And again, “Keep My commandments, and live; and my law as the

apple of thine eye. Bind them upon thy fingers, write them upon the table of thine heart" (Pro 7:2-3). This cannot be done by reading the Bible for a few minutes, and then an hour later forgetting what has been read. Shame on us that we should treat God's Word so lightly. No, we must "meditate therein day and night" (Psa 1:2). Unless we do so, we shall never be able to say, "Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee" (Psa 119:11); nor shall we be able to say, "Blessed art thou, O LORD: teach me thy statutes" (Psa 119:12).

Attend to Holiness

To "keep" the heart signifies attending diligently to its progress or decays in holiness. What health is to the body holiness is to the soul. "I commune with mine own heart: and my spirit made diligent search" (Psa 77:6): this is absolutely essential if a healthy spiritual life is to be maintained: a part of each day should be set aside for the study of the heart and cultivation of its faculties. The more this is done, the less difficulty shall we experience in knowing what to pray for! Oh, shame on us that we are so diligent in thinking about and caring for our bodies, while the state of our souls is so rarely inquired after.

Emulate the example of Hezekiah, who "humbled himself for the pride of his heart" (2Ch 32:26). Peter's heart was lifted up with self-confidence: his fall was preceded by "a haughty spirit" (Pro 16:18).

It is in the heart that all backsliding begins. Observe closely your affections and see whether God or the world is gaining ground in them. Watch whether you experience increasing profit and pleasure in reading God's Word, or whether you have to force yourself to it in order to discharge a duty. Observe the same thing in connection with prayer: whether you are finding increased or decreased liberty in pouring out your heart to God; whether you are having more freedom in so doing, or whether it is becoming an irksome task. Examine well your spiritual graces, and ascertain whether your faith be in lively exercise, feeding upon the precepts and promises of God; whether your hope is lively, anticipating the glorious future; whether your love be fervent or cold; whether patience, meekness, self-control be greater or less.

To "keep" the heart signifies to store it well with pure and holy things. As the most effective way of getting a child to willingly drop some dirty trifle is to proffer it an apple or orange, so the best security for the soul against the allurements of Satan is to have it engaged with a lovelier and more satisfying Object. A heart which is filled and engaged with good is best protected against evil. Note well the order in Philippians 4:6-8, "Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God: And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things." The heart which casts all its care upon God is well guarded from anxiety by His peace; but a pure

atmosphere must be breathed if the soul is to be kept healthy, and that is best promoted by thinking about wholesome, lovely, and praise-provoking things.

Commune frequently with Christ: dwell upon His loveliness, stay in the sunshine of His presence, refresh your soul with those gifts and graces He is ever ready to bestow, and you shall have in yourself “a well of water springing up into everlasting life” (Joh 4:14). “Were our affections filled, taken up, and possessed with these things (the beauty of God and the glory of Christ), as it is our duty that they should be, and as it is our happiness when they are, what access could sin—with its painted pleasures, with its sugared poisons, with its envenomed baits—have upon our souls? How we should loathe all its proposals, and say unto them, Get you hence as an abominable thing” (John Owen).

II. Diligent Effort ¹²⁹

As well might a poor man expect to be rich in this world without industry, or for a weak man to become strong and healthy without food and exercise, as for a Christian to be rich in faith and strong in the Lord without earnest endeavour and diligent effort. It is true that all our labours amount to nothing unless the Lord bless them (Psa 127:1), as it also is that apart from Him we can do nothing (Joh 15:5). Nevertheless, God places no premium upon sloth, and has promised that “the soul of the diligent shall be made fat” (Pro 13:4). A farmer may be fully persuaded of his own helplessness to make his fields productive, he may realize that their fertility is dependent upon the sovereign will of God, and he may also be a firm believer in the efficacy of prayer; but unless he discharges his own duty his barns will be empty. So it is spiritually.

God has not called His people to be drones, nor to maintain an attitude of passiveness. No, He bids them work, toil, labour. The sad thing is that so many of them are engaged in the wrong task, or, at least, giving most of their attention to that which is incidental, and neglecting that which is essential and fundamental. “Keep thy heart with all diligence” (Pro 4:23): this is the great task which God has assigned unto each of His children. But Oh, how sadly is the heart neglected! Of all their concerns and possessions, the least diligence is used by the vast majority of professing Christians in the keeping of their hearts. So long as they safeguard their other interests—their reputations, their bodies, their positions in the world—the heart may be left to take its own course.

As the heart in our physical body is the center and fountain of life, because from it blood circulates into every part, conveying with it either health or disease, so it is with us spiritually. If our heart be the residence of impiety, pride, avarice, malice, impure lusts, then the whole current of our lives will largely be tainted with these vices. If they are admitted there and prevail for a season, then our character and conduct will be proportionately affected. Therefore the citadel of the heart needs above all things to be well guarded, that it may not be seized by those numerous and watchful assailants which are ever attacking it. This spring needs to be well protected that its waters be not poisoned.

¹²⁹ This section is taken from the August 1933 issue of *Studies in the Scriptures*.

The man is what his heart is. If this be dead to God, then nothing in him is alive. If this be right with God, all will be right. As the mainspring of a watch sets all its wheels and parts in motion, so as a man “thinketh in his heart, so is he” (Pro 23:7). If the heart be right, the actions will be. As a man’s heart is, such is his state now and will be hereafter: if it be regenerated and sanctified there will be a life of faith and holiness in this world, and everlasting life will be enjoyed in the world to come. Therefore “Rather look to the cleansing of thine heart, than to the cleansing of thy well; rather look to the feeding of thine heart, than to the feeding of thy flock; rather look to the defending of thy heart, than to the defending of thy house; rather look to the keeping of thine heart, than to the keeping of thy money” (Peter Moffett, 1570).

What the heart is

“Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life” (Pro 4:23). The “heart” is here put for our whole inner being, the “hidden man of the heart” (1Pe 3:4). It is that which controls and gives character to all that we do. To “keep”—garrison or guard—the heart or soul is the great work which God has assigned us: the enablement is His, but the duty is ours. We are to keep the imagination from vanity, the understanding from error, the will from perverseness, the conscience clear of guilt, the affections from being inordinate and set on evil objects, the mind from being employed on worthless or vile subjects; the whole from being possessed by Satan. This, this is the work to which God has called us.

Rightly did the Puritan John Flavel say, “The keeping and right managing of the heart in every condition is the great business of a Christian’s life.” Now to “keep” the heart right, implies that it has been set right. Thus it was at regeneration, when it was given a new spiritual bent. True conversion is the heart turning from Satan’s control to God’s, from sin to holiness, from the world to Christ. To keep the heart right signifies the constant care and diligence of the renewed to preserve his soul in that holy frame to which grace has reduced it, and daily strives to hold it. “Hereupon do all events depend: the heart being kept, the whole course of our life here will be according to the mind of God, and the end of it will be the enjoyment of Him hereafter. This being neglected, life will be lost, both here as unto obedience, and hereafter as to glory” (John Owen in *Causes of Apostasy*).

1. Shut Out All That Is Opposed to God

To “keep” the heart means striving to shut out from it all that is opposed to God.” “Dear children, keep yourselves from idols” (1Jo 5:21). God is a jealous God and will brook no rival; He claims the throne of our hearts, and requires to be loved by us supremely.

When, then, we perceive our affections being inordinately drawn out unto any earthly object, we are to fight against it, and “resist the devil” (Jam 4:7). When Paul said, “All things are lawful unto me, but all things are not expedient: all things are lawful for me, but I will not be brought under the power of any” (1Co 6:12), he signifies that he was

keeping his heart diligently, that he was jealous lest things should gain that esteem and place in his soul which was due alone unto the Lord. A very small object placed immediately before the eye is sufficient to shut out the light of the sun, and trifling things taken up by the affections may soon sever communion with the Holy One.

Before regeneration our hearts were deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked (Jer 17:9): that was because the evil principle, the “flesh,” had complete dominion over them. But inasmuch as “the flesh” remains in us after conversion, and is constantly striving for the mastery over “the spirit,” the Christian needs to exercise a constant watchful jealousy over his heart, mindful of its readiness to be imposed upon, and its proneness unto a compliance with temptations. All the avenues to the heart need to be carefully guarded so that nothing hurtful enters therein, particularly against vain thoughts and imaginations, and especially in those seasons when they are most apt to gain an advantage. For if injurious thoughts are suffered to gain an inroad into the mind, if we accustom ourselves to give them entertainment, then in vain shall we hope to be “spiritually minded” (Rom 8:6). All such thoughts are only making provision to fulfill the lusts of the flesh.

Thus, for the Christian to “keep” his heart with all diligence, means for him to pay close attention to the direction in which his affections are moving, to discover whether the things of the world are gaining a firmer and fuller hold over him, or whether they are increasingly losing their charm for him. God has exhorted us, “Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth” (Col 3:2), and the heeding of this injunction calls for constant examination of the heart to discover whether or not it is becoming more and more dead unto this deceitful and perishing world, and whether heavenly things are those in which we find our chief and greatest delight. “Take heed to thyself, and keep thy soul diligently, lest thou forget the things which thine eyes have seen, and lest they depart from thy heart” (Deu 4:9).

2. Bring into Conformity with the Word

To “keep” the heart means striving to bring it into conformity with the Word. We are not to rest content until an actual image of its pure and holy teachings is stamped upon it. Alas, so many today are just playing with the solemn realities of God, allowing them to flit across their fancy, but never embracing and making them their own. Why is it, dear reader, that those solemn impressions you had when hearing a searching sermon or reading a searching article, so quickly faded away? Why did not those holy feelings and aspirations which were stirred within you last? Why have they borne no fruit? Was it not because you failed to see that your heart was duly affected by them? You failed to “hold fast” that which you had “received and heard” (Rev 3:3), and in consequence, your heart became absorbed again in “the cares of this life” or “the deceitfulness of riches,” and thus the Word was choked.

It is not enough to hear or read a powerful message from one of God’s servants, and to be deeply interested and stirred by it. If there be no diligent effort on thy part, then it will be said “your goodness is as a morning cloud, and as the early dew it goeth away”

(Hos 6:4). What, then, is required? This: earnest and persevering prayer that God will fasten the message in your soul as “a nail in a sure place,” so that the devil himself cannot catch it away. What is required? This: “Mary kept all these things, and pondered them in her heart” (Luk 2:19). Things which are not duly pondered are soon forgotten: meditation stands to reading as mastication does to eating. What is required? This, that you promptly put into practice what you have learned: walk according to the light God has given, or it will quickly be taken from you (Luk 8:18).

Not only must the outward actions be regulated by the Word, but the heart must also be conformed thereto. It is not enough to abstain from murder: the causeless anger must be put away. It is not enough to abstain from the act of adultery: the inward lust must be mortified too (Mat 5:28). God not only takes note of and keeps a record of all our external conduct, but He “weigheth the spirits” (Pro 16:2). Every thing is naked and open before Him with whom we have to do (Heb 4:13). Not only so, He requires us to scrutinize the springs from which our actions proceed, to examine our motives, to ponder the spirit in which we act. God requireth truth—that is, sincerity (reality)—in “the inward parts” (Psa 51:6). Therefore does He command us “Keep thy heart with all diligence, for out of it are the issues of life” (Pro 4:23).

3. Keep Tender unto Sin

To “keep” the heart means to preserve it tender unto sin. The unregenerate man makes little or no distinction between sin and crime: so long as he keeps within the law of the land, and maintains a reputation for respectability among his fellows, he is, generally speaking, quite satisfied with himself. But it is far otherwise with one who has been born again: he has been awakened to the fact that he has to do with God, and must yet render a full account unto Him. He makes conscience of a hundred things which the unconverted never trouble themselves about. When the Holy Spirit first convicted him, he was made to feel that his whole life had been one of rebellion against God, of pleasing himself. The consciousness of this pierced him to the very quick: his inward anguish far exceeded any pains of body or sorrow occasioned by temporal losses. He saw himself to be a spiritual leper, and hated himself for it, and mourned bitterly before God. He cried, “Hide thy face from my sins, and blot out all mine iniquities. Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me” (Psa 51:9-10).

Now it is the duty of the Christian, and part of the task which God has set him, to see to it that this sense of the exceeding sinfulness of sin be not lost. He is to labour daily that his heart be duly affected by the heinousness of self-will and self-love. He is to steadfastly resist every effort of Satan to pity himself, to think lightly of wrong doing, or to excuse himself in the same. He is to live in the constant realization that the eye of God is ever upon him, so that when tempted he will say with Joseph, “How then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?” (Gen 39:9). He is to view sin in the light of the Cross, daily reminding himself that it was his iniquities which caused the Lord of Glory to be made a curse for him—employing the dying love of Christ as a motive why he must

not allow himself in anything that is contrary to the holiness and obedience which the Saviour asks from all His redeemed.

Ah, my Christian reader, it is no child's play to "keep the heart with all diligence." The easy-going religion of our day will never take its devotees (or rather, its victims!) to heaven. The question has been asked, "Who shall ascend into the hill of the Lord, or who shall stand in his holy place?" (Psa 24:3), and plainly has the question been answered by God Himself: "He that hath clean hands, and a pure heart" etc. (Psa 24:4). Equally plain is the teaching of the New Testament, "Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God" (Mat 5:8). A "pure heart" is one that hates sin, which makes conscience of sin, which grieves over it, which strives against it. A "pure heart" is one that seeks to keep undefiled the temple of the Holy Spirit, the dwelling place of Christ (Eph 3:17).

4. Look after Cleansing

To "keep" the heart means to look diligently after its cleansing. Perhaps some of our readers often find themselves sorrowfully crying, "O the vileness of my heart!" Thank God, if He has discovered this to you; if such be so, and you really feel it, it is clear proof that He has made you to differ from the multitudes of blindly-indifferent professing Christians all around you. But, dear friend, there is no sufficient reason why your "heart" should continue to be vile. You might lament that your garden was overgrown with weeds and filled with rubbish; but need it remain so? We speak now not of your sinful nature, the incurable and unchangeable "flesh" which still indwells you; but of your heart, which God bids you "keep." You are responsible to purge your mind of vain imaginations, your soul of unlawful affections, your conscience of guilt.

But, alas, you say, "I have no control over such things: they come unbidden and I am powerless to prevent them." So the devil would have you believe! Revert again to the analogy of your garden: do not the weeds spring up unbidden; do not the slugs and other pests seek to prey upon the plants? What, then? Do you merely bewail your helplessness?

No, you resist them and take means to keep them under. Thieves enter houses uninvited, but whose fault is it if the doors and windows be left unfastened? Oh heed not the seductive lullabies of Satan. God says, "purify your hearts, ye double minded" (Jam 4:8); that is, one mind for Him, and another for self; one for holiness, and another for the pleasures of sin.

But how am I to "purify" my heart? By vomiting up the foul things taken into it—shamefacedly owning them before God, repudiating them, turning from them with loathing; and it is written "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1Jo 1:9). By daily renewing our exercise of repentance, and such repentance as is spoken of in 2 Corinthians 7:11: "For behold this selfsame thing, that ye sorrowed after a godly sort, what carefulness it wrought in you, yea, what clearing of yourselves, yea, what indignation, yea, what fear, yea, what vehement desire, yea, what zeal, yea, what revenge! In all things ye have approved yourselves to be clear in this matter." By the daily exercise of faith (Act 15:9), appropriating afresh the cleansing blood of Christ, bathing every night in that "fountain" which has been

opened “for sin and for uncleanness” (Zec 13:1). By treading the path of God’s commandments: “Seeing ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit” (1Pe 1:22).

We close this first article by pointing out, what is obvious to every Christian reader, namely, that such a task calls for divine aid. Help and grace need to be earnestly and definitely sought of the Holy Spirit each day. We should bow before God, and in all simplicity say, “Lord, Thou requirest me to keep my heart with all diligence, and I feel utterly incompetent for such a task: such a work lies altogether beyond my poor feeble powers; therefore, I humbly ask Thee in the name of Christ to graciously grant unto me supernatural strength to do as Thou hast bidden me. Lord, work in me both to will and to do of Thy good pleasure.”

III. “The Lord Looketh on the Heart” ¹³⁰

“Man looketh on the outward appearance, but the LORD looketh on the heart” (1Sa 16:7). How prone we are to be occupied with that which is evanescent,¹³¹ rather than with the things that abide; how ready to gauge things by our senses, instead of by our rational powers. How easily we are deceived by that which is on the surface, forgetting that true beauty lies within. How slow we are to adopt God’s way of estimating. Instead of being attracted by comeliness of physical features, we should value moral qualities and spiritual graces. Instead of spending so much care, time, and money in the adorning of the body, we ought to devote our best attention unto the developing and directing of the faculties of our souls. Alas, the vast majority of our fellows live as though they had no souls, and the average professing Christian gives very little serious thought unto the same.

Yes, the Lord “looketh on the heart”: He sees its thoughts and intents, knows its desires and designs, beholds its motives and motions, and deals with us accordingly. The Lord discerns what qualities are in our hearts: what holiness and righteousness, what wisdom and prudence, what justice and integrity, what mercy and kindness. When such graces are lively and flourishing, then is fulfilled that verse “My beloved is gone down into his garden, to the beds of spices, to feed in the gardens, and to gather lilies” (Song 6:2). God esteems nothing so highly as holy faith, unfeigned love, and filial fear; in His sight a “meek and quiet spirit” is of “great price” (1Pe 3:4). Oh to be careful in the cultivation of that which gives Him delight: then “keep thine heart with all diligence” (Pro 4:23).

False Profession or True Conversion

The sincerity of our profession largely depends upon the care and conscience we have in keeping our hearts. A very searching example of this is found in 2 Kings 10:31, “But Jehu took no heed to walk in the law of the LORD God of Israel with all his heart.” Those words are the more solemn because of what is said of him in the previous verse: “And the

¹³⁰ This section is taken from the September 1933 issue of *Studies in the Scriptures*.

¹³¹ **evanescent** – vanishing, passing away.

LORD said unto Jehu, Because thou hast done well in executing that which is right in mine eyes, and hast done unto the house of Ahab according to all that was in mine heart, thy children of the fourth generation shall sit on the throne of Israel.” Jehu was partial in his reformation, which showed his heart was not right with God; he abhorred the worship of Baal which Ahab had fostered, but he tolerated the golden calves which Jeroboam had set up. He failed to put away all the evil.

Ah, my reader, true conversion is not only turning away from gross sin, it is the heart forsaking all sin. There must be no reserve, for God will not allow any idol, nor must we. Jehu went so far, but he stopped short of the vital point; he put away evil, but he did not do that which was good. He heeded not the law of the Lord to walk in it “with all his heart.” It is greatly to be feared that those who are heedless are graceless, for where the principle of holiness is planted in the heart, it makes its possessor circumspect and desirous of pleasing God in all things—not from servile fear, but from grateful love; not by constraint, but freely; not occasionally, but constantly.

“Give Me Thine Heart”

“My son, give me thine heart” (Pro 23:26). “The heart is that which the great God requires, and calls for from every one of us; whatever we give, if we do not give Him our hearts, it will not be accepted. We must set our love upon Him; our thoughts must converse much with Him; and on Him, as our highest end, the intents of our hearts must be fastened. We must make it our own act and deed to devote ourselves to the Lord, and we must be free and cheerful in it. We must not think to divide the heart between God and the world; He will have all or none: ‘thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart.’ To this call we must readily answer: My Father, take my heart, such as it is, and make it such as it should be; take possession of it, and set up Thy throne in it” (Matthew Henry, 1662-1714).

Diligence

“Keep thy heart with all diligence” (Pro 4:23). Guard it jealously as the dwelling place of Him to whom you have given it. Guard it with the utmost vigilance, for not only is there the enemy without seeking entrance, but there is a traitor within desirous of dominion. The Hebrew for “with all diligence” literally rendered is, “above all”: above all the concerns of thy outward life—for careful as we should be as to that, it is before the eyes of men, whereas the heart is the object of God’s holy gaze. Then “keep” or preserve it more sedulously¹³² than your reputation, your body, your estate, your money. With all earnestness and prayer, labour that no evil desire prevails or abides there, avoiding all that excites lust, feeds pride, or stirs up anger, crushing the first emotions of such evils as you would the brood of a scorpion.

¹³² **sedulously** – industriously, with constant and continued application.

Circumstances and Conditions

Many people place great expectations in varied circumstances and conditions. One thinks he could serve God much better if he were more prospered temporally; another, if he passed through the refining effects of poverty and affliction. One thinks his spirituality would be promoted if he could be more retired and solitary; another, if only he could have more society and Christian fellowship. But, my reader, the only way to serve God better is to be content with the place in which He has put you, and therein get a better heart! We shall never enter into the advantages of any situation, nor overcome the disadvantages of any condition, until we fix and water the root of them in ourselves. Out of the heart are the “issues of life,” and not from our surroundings. “Make the tree good, and his fruit good” (Mat 12:33): get the heart right, and you will soon be superior unto all “circumstances.”

Nature verses Heart

“But how can I get my heart right? Can the Ethiopian change his skin or the leopard his spots?” Answer, you are creating your own difficulty by confounding “heart” with “nature;” they are quite distinct. It is important to recognize this, for many are confused thereon. There has been such an undue emphasis upon the “two natures in the Christian,” that often it has been lost sight of that the Christian is a person over and above his two natures. The Scriptures make the distinction clear enough. For example, God does not bid us keep our “nature,” but He does our “heart.” We do not believe with our “nature,” but we do with our “hearts” (Rom 10:10)! God never tells us to “rend” our nature (Joe 2:13), “circumcise” our nature (Deu 10:16), “purify” our nature (Jam 4:8), but He does our “hearts”! The “heart” is the very center of my responsibility, and to deny that I am to improve and keep it, is to repudiate human accountability.

Responsibility

It is the devil who seeks to persuade people that they are not responsible for the state of their hearts, and may no more change them than they can the stars in their courses. And the “flesh” within finds such a lie very agreeable to its case. But he who has been regenerated by the sovereign grace of God, cannot, with the Scriptures before him, give heed unto any such delusion. While he has to deplore how sadly neglected is the great task which God has set before him, while he has to bemoan his wretched failure in making his heart what it ought to be, nevertheless, he wants to do better; and after his duty has been pressed upon him—as it now has upon the readers of these articles—he will daily seek grace to better discharge his duty, and instead of being totally discouraged by the difficulty and greatness of the work required, he will cry the more fervently to the Holy Spirit for His enablement.

The Christian who means business will labour to have:

- A “willing” heart (Exo 35:5)—acting gladly, not of necessity,
- A “perfect” heart (1Ch 29:9)—sincere, genuine, upright,

- A “tender” heart (2Ch 34:27)—yielding and pliable, the opposite of hard and stubborn,
- A “broken” heart (Psa 34:18)—sorrowing over all failure and sin,
- A “united” heart (Psa 86:11)—all the affections centered on God,
- An “enlarged” heart (Psa 119:32)—delighting in every part of Scripture, and loving all God’s people,
- A “sound” heart (Pro 14:30)—right in doctrine and practice,
- A “merry” heart (Pro 15:15)—rejoicing in the Lord always,
- A “pure” heart (Mat 5:8)—hating all evil,
- An “honest and good heart” (Luk 8:15)—free from guile and hypocrisy, willing to be searched through and through by the Word,
- A “single” heart (Eph 6:5)—desiring only God’s glory,
- A “true” heart (Heb 10:22)—genuine in all its dealings with God.

IV. Distinctive and Critical Seasons

The duty of keeping the heart with the utmost diligence, is binding upon the Christian at all times: there is no period or condition of life in which he may be excused from this work. Nevertheless, there are distinctive seasons, critical hours, which call for more than a common vigilance over the heart, and it is a few of these which we would now contemplate, seeking help from above to point out some of the most effectual aids unto the right accomplishment of the task God has assigned us. General principles are always needful and beneficial, yet details have to be furnished if we are to know how to apply them in particular circumstances. It is this lack of definiteness which constitutes one of the most glaring defects in so much modern ministry. Mere generalizations and platitudes are substituted for specific instructions, and God has good reason to complain today, “My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge” (Hos 4:6).

1. In Times of Prosperity

When providence smiles upon us and bestows temporal gifts with a lavish hand, then has the Christian urgent reason to keep his heart with all diligence, for that is the time we are apt to grow careless, proud, earthly. Therefore was Israel cautioned of old, “And it shall be, when the LORD thy God shall have brought thee into the land which He swore unto thy fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to give thee great and goodly cities, which thou buildedst not, And houses full of all good things, which thou filledst not, and wells digged, which thou diggedst not, vineyards and olive trees, which thou plantedst not; when thou shalt have eaten and be full; Then beware lest thou forget the LORD” (Deu 6:10-12). But they heeded not that exhortation, for “Jeshurun waxed fat, and kicked” (Deu 32:15).

Many are the warnings furnished in Scripture. Of Uzziah it is recorded, “when he was strong, his heart was lifted up to his destruction” (2Ch 26:16). Of the king of Tyre, God

said, "thine heart is lifted up because of thy riches" (Eze 28:5). Of Israel we read, "And they took strong cities, and a fat land, and possessed houses full of all goods, wells digged, vineyards, and oliveyards, and fruit trees in abundance: so they did eat, and were filled, and became fat, and delighted themselves in thy great goodness. Nevertheless they were disobedient, and rebelled against thee, and cast thy law behind their backs, and slew thy prophets which testified against them to turn them to thee" (Neh 9:25-26). And again, "Of their silver and their gold have they made them idols" (Hos 8:4); "according to the goodness of his land they have made goodly images" (Hos 10:1); "According to their pasture, so were they filled; they were filled, and their heart was exalted; therefore have they forgotten me" (Hos 13:6).

Sad indeed are the above passages, the more so because we have seen such a tragic repetition of them in our own days. Oh the earthly-mindedness which prevailed, the indulging of the flesh, the sinful extravagance, which were seen among professing Christians while "times were good!" How practical godliness waned, how the denying of self disappeared, how covetousness, pleasure, and wantonness possessed the great majority of those calling themselves the people of God. Yet great as was their sin, far greater was that of most of the preachers, who instead of warning, admonishing, rebuking, and setting before their people an example of sobriety and thrift, criminally remained silent upon the crying sins of their hearers, and themselves encouraged the reckless spending of money and the indulgence of worldly lusts. How, then, is the Christian to keep his heart from these things in times of prosperity?

First, by seriously pondering the dangerous and ensnaring temptations which attend a prosperous condition, for very, very few of those that live in the prosperity and pleasures of this world escape eternal perdition. "It is easier (said Christ) for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God" (Mat 19:24).

Oh, what multitudes have been carried to hell in the cushioned chariots of earthly wealth and ease, while a comparative handful have been whipped to heaven by the rod of affliction. Remember too that many of the Lord's own people have sadly deteriorated in seasons of worldly success. When Israel was in a low condition in the wilderness, then were they "holiness unto the Lord" (Jer 2:3); but when they fed in the fat pastures of Canaan they said, "We are lords; we will come no more unto thee" (Jer 2:31).

Second, diligently seek grace to heed that word, "If riches increase, set not your heart upon them" (Psa 62:10). Those riches may be given to try thee; not only are they most uncertain things, often taking to themselves wings and flying swiftly away, but at best they cannot satisfy the soul, and only perish with the using. Remember that God values no man a jot more for these things. He esteems us by inward graces, and not outward possessions: "in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him" (Act 10:35). Third, urge upon thy soul the consideration of that awful Day of Reckoning, wherein, according to our receipt of mercies, so shall be our accountings of them: "For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much

required” (Luk 12:48). Each of us must yet give an account of our stewardship: of every dollar we have spent, of every hour wasted, of every idle word uttered!

2. In Times of Adversity

When providence frowns upon us, overturning our cherished plans, and blasting our outward comforts, then has the Christian urgent need to look to his heart, and keep it with all diligence from replying against God or fainting under His hand. Job was a mirror of patience, yet his heart was discomposed by trouble. Jonah was a man of God, yet he was peevish under trial. When the food supplies gave out in the wilderness, they who had been miraculously delivered from Egypt, and who sang Jehovah’s praises so heartily at the Red Sea, murmured and rebelled. It takes much grace to keep the heart calm amid the storms of life, to keep the spirit sweet when there is much to embitter the flesh, and to say “The LORD gave, and the LORD hath taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD” (Job 1:21). Yet this is a Christian duty! The following are helps thereunto.

First, consider, fellow-Christian, that despite these cross providences, God is still faithfully carrying out the great design of electing love upon the souls of His people, and orders these very afflictions as means sanctified to that end. Nothing happens by chance, but all by divine counsel (Eph 1:11), and therefore it is that “all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose” (Rom 8:28). Ah, beloved, it will wonderfully calm thy troubled breast and sustain thy fainting heart to rest upon that blessed fact. The poor worldling may say, “the bottom has dropped out of everything,” but not so the saint, for the eternal God is his refuge, and underneath him are still the “everlasting arms.” Then, “Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid” (Joh 14:27). The very afflictions which are so painful unto flesh and blood are designed for our spiritual blessing: God chastens for “our profit” (Heb 12:10).

It is ignorance or forgetfulness of God’s loving designs which makes us so prone to chafe under His providential dealings. If faith were more in exercise, we should, “Count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations” or “trials” (Jam 1:2). Why so? Because we should discern those very trials were sent to wean our hearts from this empty world, to tear down pride and carnal security, to refine us. If, then, my Father has a design of love unto my soul, do I well to be angry with Him? If not now, later you will see those bitter disappointments were blessings in disguise, and will exclaim, “It is good for me that I have been afflicted” (Psa 119:71).

Second,¹³³ it is of great efficacy to keep the heart from sinking under affliction, to call to mind that our own Father has the ordering of them: not a creature can move either hand or tongue against us, but by His permission. Suppose the cup be a bitter one which He has given thee to drink, still there is no poison in it. Hath not God said, “I will do you no hurt” (Jer 25:6)! If you be really one of His children thou liest too near Him to

¹³³ The section that follows is taken from the October 1933 issue of *Studies in the Scriptures*.

injure thee. Thy highest good is ever before Him, and though He spares not the rod when we need it, yet it is love which wields it (Heb 12:6). Suppose a faithful and tender-hearted physician had studied well the case of a patient, and had prescribed the most excellent remedies to spare his life; would he not be grieved to hear him cry out “you have poisoned me,” because it gripes and pains him in the operation? Quell then those groundless and unreasonable suspicions of the designs of the Great Physician.

Third, though God hath reserved unto Himself the right to afflict His people, yet He has pledged Himself not to take His lovingkindness from them: “If his children forsake my law, and walk not in my judgments; If they break my statutes, and keep not my commandments; Then will I visit their transgression with the rod, and their iniquity with stripes. Nevertheless my lovingkindness will I not utterly take from him, nor suffer my faithfulness to fail” (Psa 89:30-33). Can I look that Scripture in the face with a murmuring or repining spirit? Oh naughty heart! Doest thou well to be discontented, when God hath given thee the whole tree with all its clusters of comfort, because He suffers the wind to blow down a few leaves! Christians have both spiritual blessings and temporal mercies, the one abiding, the other movable: since God has eternally secured the former, never let thy heart be troubled at the loss of the latter.

Fourth, may it not be that by these humbling providences God is now accomplishing that for which you have long prayed and waited for? If so, is it not foolish to be worried over the same? You have asked Him to refine your soul, to conform you more unto the image of Christ, to deliver you from the power of sin, to discover unto you the emptiness and insufficiency of the creature, to so mortify your worldly and fleshly lusts that you might find all your enjoyment and satisfaction in Christ. Then by these impoverishing strokes God is now fulfilling thy desires. Wouldst thou be delivered from temptation?—then He has hedged up thy way with thorns. Wouldst thou see the vanity of the creature?—He has now revealed it to thy experience. Wouldst thou have thy corruptions mortified?—He has taken away the food and fuel that maintained them. As prosperity begat and fed them, so adversity, when sanctified, is a means to kill them. Wouldst thou have thy heart rest in the bosom of God?—He has pulled from under thy head the soft pillow of creature-delights on which before you rested!

Finally, if like Rebekah of old, thou still refusest to be comforted or quieted (Gen 27:46), then consider one thing more, which if it be seriously pondered will doubtless still thy soul. Compare the condition you are now in, and with which thou art so much dissatisfied, with that of the damned! Some of those you used to associate and make merry with are now wailing and gnashing their teeth under the scourge of divine vengeance. They are roaring amid the unquenchable flames of hell; and deservedst not thou to be among them! Oh my friend, your present lot, no matter how unpleasant it be, cannot for a moment be compared with theirs. How gladly would they change places with you. Let the knowledge that your sins deserved eternal torment make you thank God heartily for a crust of bread and a cup of water.

3. In Times of Public Danger

We do not wish to be an alarmist, or needlessly excite the fear of our readers, but judging from God's ways in the past, it would seem quite likely that social upheavals, and the menacing of property and life, are not far distant. We say this, not merely because of the discontent which is now seething within the lower and rougher elements, nor because that tens of thousands, feeling so severely the pinch of poverty, are being driven to the point of desperation, but because so very few professing Christians have yet humbled themselves beneath the mighty hand of God, and evidenced any godly sorrow for their past extravagances, or show any marked reformation in their lives today. One wonders how much distress and suffering it will take before the haughty are humbled, and before those who are lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God will give Him the place which is His right in their hearts and lives.

There can be no social revolution, no setting at defiance of established law and order, while the restraining hand of God curbs the wilder passions of men. The Almighty has perfect control of all His creatures, and therefore His people are bidden to pray "for kings, and for all that are in authority; that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty" (1Ti 2:2)—such a petition would be useless were not the helm of all events held by the hand of the Lord. And it is for the sake of His own elect that God prevents the reprobate from turning this world into bedlum and shambles. But if His own people have wandered so far from Him as not to have His ear, if they will not repent of and turn away from their wicked ways now that His chastening hand is lightly laid upon them, then He will most probably resort to far sterner measures, and force them to their knees.

He who reads with any degree of attention the history of Israel, especially that portion of it recorded in the book of Judges, will see that God had to employ drastic means to turn them from their idols. So too he who has any fair acquaintance with the history of the "Christian" nations of Europe during the sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth centuries, will discover there several solemn illustrations of the same principle. And it seems to the writer that something more than an industrial depression, something more than financial straitness and flu epidemics, will be required to bring to an end the present frightful desecration of the Holy Sabbath, the brazen immodesty which stalks through the land, the spirit of lawlessness which abounds on every side. God may soon unleash the hounds of anarchy! Suppose He does: that would be another critical hour wherein we would need to exercise special care over our hearts. "Hear for the time to come" (Isa 42:23)!

In times of danger and public distraction the stoutest souls are apt to be surprised by slavish fear. When there are ominous signs in the heavens, and on earth distress of nations, with perplexity, then the hearts of men fail them for fear, and the looking after those things which are coming on the earth (Luk 21:25-26). But it should not be thus with the saints: they ought to be of a more raised spirit. Those who are walking with God may say, "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore will not we fear,

though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea; Though the waters thereof roar and be troubled” (Psa 46:1-3). With David they will exclaim, “The LORD is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? the LORD is the strength of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?” (Psa 27:1).

How to respond in times of danger

How, then, may a Christian preserve his heart from distracting and tormenting fears in times of great or threatening danger?

First, even then all creatures are in the directing hand of God, and can only move as He permits them. Let this truth be well settled by faith in the heart, and it will have a marvelous quieting effect upon it. A lion at large is a terrible creature to meet, but not so when he is in the keeper’s hand. Dreadful indeed will it be if a time of Bolshevism should break loose in this land, but even so He who rules heaven and earth shall say, “Thus far shalt thou come, and no further” (Job 38:11). Even then, my brother or sister, God would still be your Father, and much more tender toward you than you are unto yourself. Let me ask the most nervous woman whether there would not be a vast difference between a drawn sword in the hand of a bloody ruffian, and the same sword in the hand of a loving husband? As great a difference is there in looking upon creatures by an eye of sense, and looking on them as in the hand of your God by an eye of faith.

Second, urging upon yourself the express prohibitions of Christ in this case, and let thy soul stand in awe of the violation of them. The Son of God has charged you, “When ye shall hear of wars and commotions, be not terrified” (Luk 21:9); then cry unto Him for supernatural grace to obey. “In nothing terrified by your adversaries” (Phi 1:28).

Three times over in Matthew 10:26-31, Christ commands us not to fear “men.” Does the voice of a creature make thee tremble, and shall not the voice of God? If thou art of such a timorous spirit, how is it that thou fearest not to disobey the plain commands of Christ? Surely His word should have more power to calm thee than the voice of a poor worm of the earth to terrify. “I, even I, am He that comforteth you: who art thou, that thou shouldest be afraid of a man that shall die?” (Isa 51:12).

Third, consult the many precious promises which are recorded for your support and comfort in all dangers: these are the refuges to which you may fly and be safe. There are particular promises suited to particular cases and exigencies. “Thou shalt not be afraid for the terror by night; nor for the arrow that flieth by day; Nor for the pestilence that walketh in darkness; nor for the destruction that wasteth at noonday. A thousand shall fall at thy side, and ten thousand at thy right hand; but it shall not come nigh thee. Only with thine eyes shalt thou behold and see the reward of the wicked. Because thou hast made the LORD, which is thy refuge, even the Most High, thy habitation; There shall no evil befall thee, neither shall any plague come nigh thy dwelling. For he shall give his angels charge over thee, to keep thee in all thy ways” (Psa 91:5-11). “Fear not: for I have redeemed thee, I have called thee by thy name; thou art mine. When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow

thee: when thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned; neither shall the flame kindle upon thee" (Isa 43:1-2).

Finally, make sure of the eternal interest of thy soul in the hands of Jesus Christ: when that is done, then you may say, Now world do thy worst. You will not be very solicitous about a vile body, when you know that it shall be well to all eternity with your precious soul. "And I say unto you my friends, Be not afraid of them that kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do" (Luk 12:4). If you are truly and Scripturally assured that your spirit will be received by Christ into an everlasting habitation the moment of its dismissal from the body, trouble not yourself about the instruments and means of its dismissal. "O but a violent death is terrible to nature"! But what matter is it when thy soul is in heaven whether it be let out at thy mouth or thy throat? whether thy familiar friends or barbarous enemies close thy dead eyes? Thy soul in heaven shall not be conscious of how thy body is abused on earth.

4. In Times of Trouble in the Church

In times of Zion's trouble it behooves public and tender hearts to be delivered from sinking into despondency and despair. When we see the once fair gardens of the Church, with their hedges broken down, the boar running wild therein, the flowers replaced by weeds, it makes a godly soul cry, "Oh that my head were waters, and mine eyes a fountain of tears" (Jer 9:1). Yes, but remember, no trouble befalls Zion, but by the permission of Zion's God, and He permits nothing out of which He will not bring much good at last. Moreover, "there must be also heresies among you, that they which are approved may be made manifest" (1Co 11:19). Again, lay hold of and persistently plead before God His promise: "When the enemy shall come in like a flood, the Spirit of the LORD shall lift up a standard against him" (Isa 59:19). However low the Church may be plunged under the waters of adversity, it shall assuredly rise again.

5. In Times of Great Injuries and Abuses

How may a Christian keep his heart from revengeful motives under the greatest injuries and abuses of men? *First*, urge upon thy soul the express commands of God: remember that this is forbidden fruit, no matter how pleasant to our vitiated appetites. Revenge is sweet, says nature; the effects thereof shall be bitter, says God. How plainly has God prohibited this flesh-pleasing sin: "Say not, I will do so to him as he hath done to me: I will render to the man according to his work" (Pro 24:29); "Avenge not yourselves" (Rom 12:19). But that is not all: "If thine enemy be hungry, give him bread to eat; and if he be thirsty, give him water to drink" (Pro 25:21). One of the many proofs of the supernatural origin of the Scriptures is that they forbid revenge which is so sweet to nature. Then awe thy heart by the authority of God in those Scriptures.

Second, set before thy soul the blessed and binding example of Christ—never did any suffer more and greater abuses from men than did the Saviour, and never was any one so peaceful and forgiving: "When he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he

threatened not; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously" (1Pe 2:23). To be of a meek and gracious spirit is to be Christ-like.

Third, calm thy heart by the realization that by revenge thou dost but satisfy a lust, but by forgiving thou shalt conquer a lust. Again, consider more frequently how often you wrong God, and then you will not be so easily enflamed against those who wrong thee. Do you still reply, But such insults and injustices are more than flesh and blood can stand? then earnestly seek supernatural grace.

6. In Times of Spiritual Gloom

How may a Christian preserve his heart from utterly sinking in seasons of spiritual gloom and the hidings of God's face? Turn unto the cheering promises which God has left on record for His backslidden people: Jeremiah 3:22, Hosea 14:4, etc. No matter what your sin or trouble be, let it drive you to God, and not from Him; cry with David, "Pardon mine iniquity; for it is great" (Psa 25:11). But suppose I can obtain no access to God, no conscious help from His Spirit, and find no ray of hope for my poor heart? Then heed this word, "Who is among you that feareth the LORD, that obeyeth the voice of His servant, that walketh in darkness, and hath no light? let him trust in the name of the LORD, and stay upon his God" (Isa 50:10).

7. In Times of Critical Illness

How may the Christian, in a time of critical illness, get his heart loose from all earthly engagements and persuade it unto a willingness to die? First, by reminding himself that death has lost its sting (1Co 15:55) and cannot harm him. Second, by considering what heavy burdens he will then be rid of. The soul pays a dear rent for the house it now lives in! But death frees the saint not only from all the troubles and trials of this life, not only from all the sufferings and pains of the body, but it delivers from all spiritual diseases—"he that is dead is freed from sin" (Rom 6:7). Justification destroys death's damning power, sanctification its reigning power, but glorification its very being and existence. At death the Christian is done forever with Satan and his temptations: then how heartily should he welcome it!

V. Other Issues ¹³⁴

The Nature verses the Heart

"God is not the author of confusion" (1Co 14:33); no, the devil causes that, and he has succeeded in creating much in the thinking of many, by confounding the "heart" with the "nature." People say, "I was born with an evil heart, and I cannot help it." It would be more correct to say, "I was born with an evil nature, which I am responsible to subdue." The Christian needs to clearly recognize that in addition to his two "natures"—the flesh and the spirit—he has a heart which God requires him to "keep." We have already touched upon this point, but deem it advisable to add a further word thereon. I

¹³⁴ This section is taken from the November 1933 issue of *Studies in the Scriptures*.

cannot change or better my “nature,” but I may and must my “heart.” For example, “nature” is slothful and loves ease, but the Christian is to redeem the time and be zealous of good works. Nature hates the thought of death, but the Christian should bring his heart to desire to depart and be with Christ.

“Head religion”

The popular religion of the day is either a head or a hand one: that is to say, the labouring to acquire a larger and fuller intellectual grasp of the things of God, or a constant round of activities called “service for the Lord.” But the heart is neglected! Thousands are reading, studying, taking “Bible-courses,” but for all the spiritual benefits their souls derive, they might as well be engaged in breaking stones. Lest it be thought that such a stricture is too severe, we quote a sentence from a letter recently received from one who has completed no less than eight of these “Bible-study courses”: “There was nothing in that ‘hard work’ which ever called for self-examination, which led me to really know God, and appropriate the Scriptures to my deep need.” No, of course there was not: their compilers—like nearly all the speakers at the big “Bible conferences”—studiously avoid all that is unpalatable to the flesh, all that condemns the natural man, all that pierces and searches the conscience. Oh, the tragedy of this head “Christianity.”

“Hand religion”

Equally pitiable is the hand religion of the day, when young “converts” are put to teaching a Sunday school class, urged to “speak” in the open air, or take up “personal work.” How many thousands of beardless youths and young girls are now engaged in what is called “winning souls for Christ,” when their own souls are spiritually starved! They may “memorize” two or three verses of Scripture a day, but that does not mean their souls are being fed. How many are giving their evenings to helping in some “mission,” who need to be spending time in “the secret place of the Most High”! And how many bewildered souls are using the major part of the Lord’s day in rushing from one meeting to another, instead of seeking from God that which will fortify them against temptations of the week. Oh, the tragedy of this hand “Christianity”!

How subtle the devil is! Under the guise of promoting growth in “the knowledge of the Lord,” he gets people to attend a ceaseless round of meetings, reading an almost endless number of religious periodicals and books, all under the pretense of “honouring the Lord” by all this so-called “service.” He induces the one or the other to neglect the great task which God has set before us: “Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life” (Pro 4:23). Ah, it is far easier to speak to others, than it is to constantly use and improve all holy means and duties to preserve the soul from sin, and maintain it in sweet and free communion with God. It is far easier to spend an hour reading a sensational article upon “the signs of the time,” than it is to spend an hour in agonizing before God for purifying and rectifying grace!

Supreme Importance

This work of keeping the heart is of supreme importance. The total disregard of it means that we are mere formalists. “My son, give me thine heart” (Pro 23:26): until that be done, God will accept nothing from us. The prayers and praises of our lips, the labour of our hands, yea, and a correct outward walk, are things of no value in His sight, while the heart be estranged from Him. As the inspired Apostle declared, “Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not love, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal. And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not love, I am nothing. And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not love, it profiteth me nothing” (1Co 13:1-3). If the heart be not right with God, we cannot worship Him, though we may go through the form of it. Watch diligently, then, your love for Him.

God cannot be imposed upon, and he that takes no care to order his heart aright before Him is a hypocrite. “And they come unto thee as the people cometh, and they sit before thee as My people, and they hear thy words, but they will not do them: for with their mouth they show much love, but their heart goeth after their covetousness. And, lo, thou art unto them as a very lovely song of one that hath a pleasant voice, and can play well on an instrument” (Eze 33:31-32). Here are a company of formal hypocrites, as is evident from the words “as my people”: like them, but not of them! And what constituted them impostors? Their outside was very fair—high professions, reverent postures, much seeming delight in the means of grace. Ah, but their hearts were not set on God, but were commanded by their lusts, and went after covetousness.

But lest a real Christian should infer from the above that he is a hypocrite too, because many times his heart wanders, and he finds—strive all he may—that he cannot keep his mind stayed upon God either when praying, reading His Word, or engaged in public worship: to him we answer, the objection carries its own refutation. Thou sayest, “strive all I may;” ah, if you have, then the blessing of the upright is yours, even though God sees well to exercise you over the affliction of a wandering mind. There remains still much in the understanding and affections to humble thee, but if you are exercised over them, strive against them, and sorrow over your very imperfect success, then that is quite enough to clear thee of the charge of reigning hypocrisy.

The keeping of the heart is *supremely important* because “out of it are the issues of life”: it is the source and fountain of all vital actions and operations. The heart is the warehouse, the hand and tongue but the shops; what is in these comes from thence—the heart contrives and the members execute. It is in the heart the principles of the spiritual life are formed: “A good man out of the good treasure of his heart bringeth forth that which is good; and an evil man out of the evil treasure of his heart bringeth forth that which is evil” (Luk 6:45). Then let us diligently see to it that the heart be well stored with pious instruction, seeking to increase in grateful love, reverential fear, hatred of

sin, and benevolence in all its exercises, that from within these holy springs may flow and fructify our whole conduct and conversation.

This work of keeping the heart is the *hardest of all*. “To shuffle over religious duties with a loose and heedless spirit, will cost no great pains; but to set thyself before the Lord, and tie up thy loose and vain thoughts to a constant and serious attendance upon Him: this will cost something! To attain a facility and dexterity of language in prayer, and put thy meaning into apt and decent expressions, is easy; but to get thy heart broken for sin whilst thou art confessing it, be melted with free grace, whilst thou art blessing God for it, be really ashamed and humbled through the apprehensions of God’s infinite holiness, and to keep thy heart in this frame, not only in, but after duty, will surely cost thee some groans and travailing pain of soul. To repress the outward acts of sin, and compose the external acts of thy life in a laudable and comely manner, is no great matter—even carnal persons by the force of common principles can do this; but to kill the root of corruption within, to set and keep up an holy government over thy thoughts, to have all things lie straight and orderly in the heart, this is not easy” (John Flavel).

Ah, dear reader, it is far, far easier to speak in the open air than to uproot pride from thy soul. It calls for much less toil to go out and distribute tracts, than it does to cast out of your mind unholy thoughts. One can speak to the unsaved much more readily than he can deny self, take up his cross daily, and follow Christ in the path of obedience. And one can teach a class in the Sunday school with far less trouble than he can teach himself how to strengthen his own spiritual graces. To keep the heart with all diligence calls for frequent examination of its frames and dispositions, the observing of its attitude toward God, and the prevailing directions of its affections; and that is something which no empty professor can be brought to do! To give liberally to religious enterprises he may, but to give himself unto the searching, purifying, and keeping of his heart, he will not.

This work of keeping the heart is a *constant* one. “The keeping of the heart is such a work as is never done till life be done: this labour and our life end together. It is with a Christian in his business, as it is with seamen that have sprung a leak at sea; if they tug not constantly at the pump, the water increases upon them, and will quickly sink them. It is in vain for them to say the work is hard, and we are weary; there is no time or condition in the life of a Christian, which will suffer an intermission of this work. It is in the keeping watch over our hearts, as it was in the keeping up of Moses’ hands, whilst Israel and Amalek were fighting below (Exo 17:12): no sooner do Moses’ hands grow heavy and sink down, but Amalek prevails. You know it cost David and Peter many a sad day and night for intermitting the watch over their own hearts but a few minutes” (John Flavel).

As long as we are in this world we must exercise the greatest diligence in protecting the heart. A significant type for the need of this is found in Numbers 19: “This is the law, when a man dieth in a tent: all that come into the tent, and all that is in the tent, shall be unclean seven days. And every open vessel, which hath no covering bound upon it, is unclean” (vv. 14-15). How many of our readers have sufficient discernment to perceive the spiritual meaning of this? Ponder it a moment before you read further. The “tent”

into which “death” has entered, is this world (Rom 5:12). The “vessel” is the human heart (Mat 25:4; 2Co 4:7). The vessel which hath “no covering bound upon it” is an un-kept heart, and this is defiled by the presence of death! It is a striking illustration of the world’s corrupting influence entering as soon as the heart be unguarded. But if the heart be “covered”—protected, vigilantly kept—then the world cannot harm it.

Corollaries and Consequences

Having sought to show that the keeping of the heart is the great work assigned the Christian, in which the very soul and life of true religion consists, and without the performance of which all other duties are unacceptable to God, let us now point out some of the corollaries and consequences which necessarily follow from this fact.

1. *The labours which many have taken in religion are lost.* Many great services have been performed, many wonderful works wrought by men, which have been utterly rejected of God, and shall receive no recognition in the Day of rewards. Why? Because they took no pains to keep their hearts with God in those duties: this is the fatal rock upon which thousands of vain professors have wrecked to their eternal undoing—they were diligent about the externals of religion, but regardless of their hearts. Oh, how many hours have professors spent in hearing, reading, conferring and praying! and yet as to the supreme task God has assigned, did nothing. Tell me, thou vain professor, when didst thou shed tears for the coldness, deadness, and worldliness of thy heart; when didst thou spend five minutes in a serious effort to keep, purge, or improve it? Thinkest thou that such an easy religion can save thee? If so, we must inverse the words of Christ and say, “Wide is the gate and broad is the way that leadeth unto life, and many there be that go in thereat” (see Matthew 7:13).

2. If the keeping of the heart be the great work of the Christian, then *how few real Christians are there in the world!* If every one who has learned the dialect of Christianity and can talk like a Christian, if every one who has natural gifts and abilities and who is helped by the common assisting presence of the Spirit to pray and teach like a Christian, if all who associate themselves with the people of God, contribute of their means to His cause, take delight in public ordinances, and pass as Christians—if these all were real ones, then the number of the saints would be considerable. But alas, to what a little flock do they shrink when measured by this rule: how few make conscience of keeping their hearts, watching their thoughts, and judging their motives. Ah, there is no human applause to induce men to engage in this difficult work, and were hypocrites to do so, they would quickly discover what they do not care to know. This heart-work is left in the hands of a few hidden ones. Reader, are you one of them?

3. Unless real Christians spend more time and pains about their hearts than they have done, *they are never likely to grow in grace*, be of much use to God, or be possessors of much comfort in this world. You say, “But my heart seems so listless and dead”—do you wonder at it, when you keep it not in daily communion with Him who is the Fountain of Life? If your body had received no more concern and attention than your soul, what state would it now be in? Oh, my Brother or Sister, has not your zeal run in

the wrong channels? God may be enjoyed even in the midst of earthly employments: “Enoch walked with God and begat sons and daughters” (Gen 5:22)—he did not retire into a monastery; nor is there any need for you to.

4. *It is high time* the Christian reader set to this heart-work in real earnest. Do not you have to lament, “They made me the keeper of the vineyards; but mine own vineyard have I not kept” (Song 1:6)? Then away with fruitless controversies and idle questions; away with empty names and vain shows; away with harsh censuring of others—turn upon thyself. You have been a stranger long enough to this work; you have trifled about the borders of religion too long: the world has deterred you from this vitally necessary work too long. Will you not now resolve to look better after thy heart? Haste thee to thy closet.

5. He that will keep his heart must *take heed against plunging himself into a multiplicity of earthly business* (either in his worldly calling or so-called religious “service”), so that he is unable to make his spiritual and eternal interests his chief concern. You say, “But I must live;” yes, and you must die! Put the claims of God and your heart first, and He will not suffer thy body to starve! Then take heed lest you neglect your soul by gratifying the immoderate clamouring of the flesh. Christ rebuked Martha because she was troubled about “many things,” and assured her that but one thing was “needful” (Luk 10:42). Oh, say with David, “One thing have I desired of the LORD, that will I seek after; that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the LORD, and to inquire in His temple” (Psa 27:4).

VI. Benefits of Keeping the Heart ¹³⁵

The heart of man is his worst part before it be regenerate, and his best part afterwards: it is the seat of principles and the source of actions. The eye of God is, and the eye of the Christian ought to be, principally fixed upon it. The great difficulty in conversion is to win the heart to God, and the great difficulty after conversion is to keep the heart with God. Herein lies the very pinch and stress of religion; here is that which makes the way to life a narrow way, and the gate of heaven a straight one. To afford some direction and help in this great work, these articles have been prepared. We realize their many defects, yet trust that God will be pleased to use them. No other subject can begin to compare with it in practical importance. The general neglect of the heart is the root cause of the present sad state of Christendom: the remainder of this article might readily be devoted unto the verifying and amplifying of that statement. Instead, we merely point out briefly one or two of the more prominent features.

Why is it that so many preachers have withheld from their congregations that which was, so obviously, most needed? Why have they spoken “smooth things” (Isa 30:10), instead of wielding the sword of the Spirit? Because their own hearts were not right with God: His holy fear was not upon them. An “honest and good heart” (Luk 8:15) will cause a servant of Christ to preach what he sees to be the most essential and profitable truths

¹³⁵ This section is taken from the December 1933 issue of *Studies in the Scriptures*.

of the Word, however displeasing they may be unto many of his people. He will faithfully rebuke, exhort, admonish, correct, and instruct, whether his hearers like it or not.

Why have so many church members departed from the faith and given heed to seducing spirits? Why have multitudes been led away by the error of the wicked, turning the grace of God into lasciviousness¹³⁶? Why have so many others been attracted to companies of notional professors, which, despite their proud boasts of being the only people gathered together in (or unto) the name of Christ, are, for the most part, people who have only an acquaintance with the letter of Scripture and are strangers to practical godliness? Ah, the answer is not far to seek: it was because they had no heart acquaintance with the things of God. It is they who are sickly and diseased which fall easy victims unto the quacks; so it is those whose hearts are never rooted and grounded in the Truth, which are tossed about with every wind of doctrine.

The study and guarding of the heart is the best antidote against the infectious errors of the times. And this leads us to point out some of the advantages of keeping the heart.

1. Understanding the Deep Things of God

The pondering and garrisoning of the heart is a great help to the understanding in the deep things of God. An honest and experienced heart is a wonderful aid to a weak head. Such a heart will serve as a commentary upon a great portion of the Scriptures. When such a one reads the Psalms of David or the Epistles of Paul, he will find there many of his own difficulties stated and solved: he will find them speaking the language of his own heart—recounting his experiences, expressing his sorrows and joys. By a close and regular study of the heart he will be far better fitted to understand the things of God, than graceless rabbis and inexperienced doctors—not only will they be clearer, but far sweeter unto him. A man may discourse orthodoxly and profoundly of the nature and effects of faith, of the preciousness of Christ, and the sweetness of communion with God, who has never felt the impressions or efficacy of them upon his own spirit. But Oh, how dull and dry will these notions be unto those who have experienced them!

Ah, my reader, experience is the great schoolmaster. Much in Job and Lamentations will seem dull and uninteresting until you have had deeper exercises of soul. The Seventh Chapter of Romans is not likely to appeal much unto you until you make more conscience of indwelling sin. Many of the later Psalms will appear too extravagant in their language until you enjoy closer and sweeter fellowship with God. But the more you endeavour to keep your heart, and bring it into subjection unto God, to keep from it the evil solicitations of Satan, the more suited to your own case will you find many chapters of the Bible. It is not simply that you have to be in the “right mood” to appreciate, but that you have to pass through certain exercises of heart ere you can discover their appropriateness. Then it is that you will have “felt” and “tasted” for yourself the things of which the inspired writers treat. Then it is you will have the key which unlocks many a verse that is fast closed unto masters of Hebrew and Greek.

¹³⁶ **lasciviousness** – looseness, wantonness, indulgence of sensual desires.

2. The Best Evidence of Sincerity

Care in keeping the heart supplies one of the best evidences of sincerity. There is no external act which distinguishes the sound from the unsound professor, but before this trial no hypocrite can stand. It is true that when they think death to be very near, many will cry out of the wickedness and fear of their hearts, but that signifies nothing more than does the howling of an animal when it is in distress. But if thou art tender of thy conscience, watchful of thy thoughts, and careful each day of the workings and frames of thy heart, this strongly argues the sincerity of it; for what but a real hatred of sin, what but a sense of the divine eye being upon thee, could put any one upon these secret duties which lie out of the observation of all creatures? If, then, it be such a desirable thing to have a fair testimony of your integrity, and to know of a truth that you fear God, then study, watch, keep the heart.

The true comfort of our souls much depends upon this, for he that is negligent in the keeping of his heart, is generally a stranger to spiritual assurance and the sweet comforts flowing from it. God does not usually indulge lazy souls with inward peace, for He will not be the patron of carelessness. He has united together our diligence and comfort, and they are greatly mistaken who suppose that the beautiful child of assurance can be born without soul pangs. Diligent self-examination is called for: first the looking into the Word, and then the looking into our hearts, to see how far they correspond. It is true the Holy Spirit indwells the Christian, but He cannot be discerned by His essence; it is His operations that manifest Him, and these are known by the graces He produces in the soul; and those can only be perceived by diligent search and honest scrutiny of the heart. It is in the heart the Spirit works.

3. Delight in Spiritual Duties

Care in keeping the heart makes blessed and fruitful the means of grace¹³⁷ and the discharge of our spiritual duties. Oh what precious communion we have with God when He is approached in a right frame of soul: then we may say with David, “My meditation of him shall be sweet” (Psa 104:34). But when the heart be indisposed, full of the things of this world, or weighted down by the cares of this life, then we miss the comfort and joy which should be ours. The sermons you hear and the articles you read (if by God’s servants), will appear very different if you bring a prepared heart to them! If the heart be right you will not grow drowsy while hearing the reading of the riches of God’s grace, the glories of Christ, the beauty of holiness, or the needs-be for a Scripturally ordered walk. It was because the heart was neglected you got so little from attending to the means of grace!

The same holds good of prayer. Oh, what a difference there is between a deeply exercised and spiritually burdened heart pouring out itself before God in fervent supplica-

¹³⁷ **means of grace** – the instruments God chooses to use in awakening a lost sinner and sanctifying the saint, such as the preaching of the Word, Bible reading, prayer, family worship, and fellowship of the saints.

tion, and the utterance of verbal petitions by rote! It is the difference between reality and formality. He who is diligent in heart-work and perceives the state of his own soul, is at no loss in knowing what to ask God for. So he who makes it a practice of walking with God, communing with God, meditating upon God, spontaneously worships Him in spirit and in truth: like David he will say, “My heart is inditing a good matter” (Psa 45:1). The Hebrew there is very suggestive: literally, it is “my heart is boiling up a good matter;” it is a figurative expression, taken from a living spring which is bubbling up fresh water. The formalist has to rack his mind, and as it were, laboriously pump up something to say unto God; but he who makes conscience of heart work finds his soul like a bottle full of new wine—ready to burst, giving vent to sorrow or joy as his case may be.

4. Stability in Resisting Temptation

Diligence in keeping the heart will make the soul stable in the hour of temptation. The care or neglect of the conscience largely determines our attitude toward and response unto solicitations of evil. The careless heart falls an easy prey to Satan. His main attacks are made upon the heart, for if he gains that, he gains all, for it commands the whole man! Alas, how easy a conquest is an unguarded heart: it is no more difficult for the devil to capture it, than for a burglar to enter a house whose windows and doors are unfastened.

It is the watchful heart that both discovers and suppresses the temptation before it comes in its full strength. It is much like a large stone rolling down a hill! it is easy to stop at first, but very difficult after it has gained full momentum. So, if we cherish the first vain imagination as it enters the mind, it will soon grow into a powerful lust which will not take a nay. Acts are preceded by desires, and desires by thoughts. A sinful object first presents itself to the imagination, and unless that be nipped in the bud, the affections will be stirred and enlisted. If the heart does not repel the evil imagination, if instead it dwells on it, encourages it, feeds on it, then it will not be long before the consent of the will is obtained.

A very large and important part of heart work lies in observing its first motions, and checking sin there. The motions of sin are weakest at the first, and a little watchfulness and care then, prevents much trouble and mischief later. But if the first movings of sin in the imagination be not observed and resisted, then the careless heart is quickly brought under the full power of temptation, and Satan is victorious.

5. Improving One's Graces

The diligent keeping of the heart is a great aid to the improving of our graces. Grace never thrives in a careless soul, for the roots and habits of grace are planted in the heart, and the deeper they are rooted there, the more thriving and flourishing grace is. In Ephesians 3:17 we read of being “rooted and grounded in love”: love in the heart is the spring of every gracious word of the mouth and of every holy act of the hand. But is not Christ the “root” of the Christian’s graces? Yes, the originating root, but grace is the derivative root, planted and nourished by Him, and according as this thrives under divine

influences, so the fruits of grace are more healthy and vigorous. But in a heart which is not kept diligently, those fructifying influences are choked. Just as in an uncared-for garden, the weeds crowd out the flowers, so vain thoughts that are not disallowed and lusts which are not mortified, devour the strength of the heart. "My soul shall be satisfied as with marrow and fatness; and my mouth shall praise thee with joyful lips: When I remember thee upon my bed, and meditate on thee in the night watches" (Psa 63:5-6).

6. Profitable Christian Fellowship

The diligent care of the heart makes Christian fellowship profitable and precious. Why is it that when Christians meet together, there are often sad jarrings and contentions? It is because of unmortified passions. Why is their conversation so frothy and worthless? It is because of the vanity and earthiness of their hearts. It is not difficult to discern by the actions and converse of Christians, what frames their spirits are under.

Take one whose mind is truly stayed upon God, and how serious, heavenly, and edifying is his conversation: "The mouth of the righteous speaketh wisdom, and his tongue talketh of judgment. The law of his God is in his heart" (Psa 37:30-31)! If each of us was humbled every day before God under the evils of his own heart, we should be more pitiful and tender toward others (Gal 6:1).

7. Fitting Us for God's Providences

A heart well kept fits us for any condition God may cast us into, or any service He has to use us in. He that has learnt to keep his heart lowly, is fit for prosperity; and he who knows how to apply Scripture promises and supports, is fit to pass through any adversity. So he that can deny the pride and selfishness of his heart is fit to be employed in any service for God. Such a man was Paul: he not only ministered to others, but looked well to his own vineyard: see 1 Corinthians 9:27. And what an eminent instrument he was for God; he knew how to abound and how to suffer loss. Let the people deify him, it moved him not, except to indignation: let them stone him, he can bear it.

8. Removing Ourselves as Stumbling Blocks

By keeping our hearts diligently we should the soonest remove the scandals and stumbling blocks out of the way of the world. Oh, how the worthy name of our Lord is blasphemed because of the wicked conduct of many who bear His name. Oh, what prejudice has been created against the Gospel by the inconsistent lives of those who preached it. But if we keep our hearts, we shall not add to the scandals caused by the ways of loose professors. Nay, those with whom we come into contact will see that we have "been with Jesus" (Act 4:13). When the majestic beams of holiness shine from a heavenly walk, the world will be awed and respect will again be commanded by the followers of the Lamb.

Though the keeping of the heart entails such hard labour, do not such blessed gains supply a sufficient incentive to engage diligently in the same? Look over the eight special benefits we have named, and weigh them in a just balance; they are not trivial things. Then guard well your heart, and watch closely its love for God. Jacob served seven years for Rachel, and they seemed unto him but a few days, for the love that he had unto her.

The labour of love is always delightful. If God has your heart, the feet will run swiftly in the way of His commandments; duty will be a delight. Then let us earnestly pray, “So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom” (Psa 90:12)—as we “apply” our hands unto manual tasks.

Conclusion

Let me now close with a word or two of consolation to all serious Christians who have sought to faithfully and closely give themselves to this heartwork, but who are groaning in secret over their apparent lack of success therein, and who are fearful that their experience falls short of a saving one. *First*, this argues that your heart is honest and upright. If you are mourning over heart conditions and sins, that is something no hypocrite does. Many a one is now in hell who had a better heart than mine; many a one now in heaven complained of as bad a heart as thine.

Second, God would never leave thee under so many heart burdens and troubles if He intended not thy benefit thereby. You say, Lord, why do I go mourning all the day having sorrow of heart? For long have I been exercised over its hardness, and not yet is it broken. Many years have I been struggling against vain thoughts, and still I am plagued by them. Oh, when shall I get a better heart? Oh that God would thereby show you what your heart by nature is, and have you take notice of how much you are beholden to free grace! So too He would keep you humble, and not fall in love with yourself.

Third, God will shortly put a blessed end to these cares, watchings, and headaches. The time is coming when your heart shall be as you would have it, when you will be delivered from all fears and sorrows, and never again cry, “O my hard, vain, earthy, filthy heart.” Then shall all darkness be purged from your understanding, all vanity from your affections, all guilt from your conscience, all perversity from your will. Then shall you be everlastingly, delightfully, ravishingly entertained and exercised upon the supreme goodness and infinite excellency of God. Soon shall break that morning without clouds, when all the shadows shall flee way; and then we “shall be like Him; for we shall see Him as He is” (1Jo 3:2). Hallelujah! ❧

For much in this article, especially the last section, we are indebted to the works of the Puritan, John Flavel (1630-1691).

Questions and Suggestions *(added by Chapel Library)*

Section I ~ “Keep Thy Heart”

1. What behaviors in your life would you like to change in order to be more obedient to God’s Word? Search out Scriptures to support these new behaviors.
2. Think about how you will “set the Lord always before you.” Record Scriptures to help you achieve this.
3. In attending to holiness, Christians are encouraged to “self observation” regarding reading God’s Word and praying. Did you make this “holiness check?” What were

your findings? Will you commit to doing this frequently in order to strive for more holiness in your life?

Section II ~ Diligent Effort

4. What is the work to which God has called the Christian?
5. How does the Christian “keep the heart with all diligence?”
6. Consider what is necessary to bring your heart into conformity with the Word.
7. How does the Christian “purify the heart?”

Section III ~ “The Lord Looketh on the Heart”

8. How do we give God our heart?
9. What is the key to contentment?
10. In what ways are we to be responsible for the state of our hearts? As a means of providing yourself with continuous encouragement, list each supporting Scripture on a 3 x 5 card so that you can review them frequently.

Section IV ~ Distinctive and Critical Seasons

11. There are seasons in life when the effort to “keep the heart” is challenged. Which of the seasons listed have been the most difficult for you in the past? What new behaviors will you put into place to meet these challenges when they occur in the future?
12. Identify one or two seasons you have never experienced and meditate on what behaviors the Scripture commands. Consider how you intend to respond if these seasons visit your life.
13. Select several Scriptures from this section that you find exceptionally edifying and record them. Consider memorizing them in order to keep your heart.

Section V ~ Other Issues

14. What is the difference between the heart and the nature of man? Which can be changed? What is the Christian directed to do?
15. Why is self-examination important? How is that carried out? Will you commit to doing this on a regular basis?
16. What is “hand” religion? Why is it dangerous? What will you do to avoid it?
17. What are the consequences of not giving God your heart?
18. Why is keeping the heart hardest of all?
19. Is keeping the heart ever completed? Identify the places and activities in your life where this will be most challenging for you.

Section VI ~ Benefits of Keeping the Heart

20. Why is the study and guarding of the heart the best antidote against the infectious errors of our time? Identify how guarding the heart provides guidance in your particular circumstances.
21. Are there specific temptations that you continually confront? Think about how you can now be more sensitive to identifying those temptations as they emerge and the tools you now have to help you resist them at the outset. ❧

The Scriptures and Obedience

Honouring Christ in the World

All professing Christians are agreed, in theory at least, that it is the bounden duty of those who bear His name to honour and glorify Christ in this world. But as to how this is to be done, as to what He requires from us to this end, there is wide difference of opinion. Many suppose that honouring Christ simply means to join some “church,” to take part in and support its various activities. Others think that honouring Christ means to speak of Him to others and be diligently engaged in “personal work.” Others seem to imagine that honouring Christ signifies little more than making liberal financial contributions to His cause. Few indeed realize that Christ is honoured only as we live holily unto Him, and that by walking in subjection to His revealed will. Few indeed really believe that word, “Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams” (1Sa 15:22).

We are not Christians at all unless we have fully surrendered to and “received Christ Jesus the Lord” (Col 2:6). Oh, dear reader, we would plead with you to ponder that statement diligently. Satan is deceiving so many today by leading them to suppose that they are savingly trusting in “the finished work” of Christ while their hearts remain unchanged and self still rules their lives. Listen to God’s Word: “Salvation is far from the wicked; for they seek not Thy statutes” (Psa 119:115). Do you really seek His “Statutes?” Do you diligently search His Word to discover what He has commanded? “He that saith, I know Him, and keepeth not His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him” (1Jo 2:4). What could be plainer than that?

Dangers of Disobedience

“And why call ye Me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?” (Luk 6:46). Reality in life, not glowing words from the lips, is what Christ requires. What a searching and solemn word is that in James 1:22: “Be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves!” There are many “hearers” of the Word, regular hearers, reverent hearers, interested hearers; but alas, what they hear is not incorporated into the life: it does not regulate their way. And God says that they who are not doers of the Word are deceiving their own selves!

Alas, how many such there are in Christendom today. They are not down-right hypocrites, but deluded. They suppose that because they are so clear upon salvation by grace

alone they are saved. They suppose that because they sit under the ministry of a man who has “made the Bible a new book” to them, they have grown in grace. They suppose that because their store of biblical knowledge has increased they are more spiritual. They suppose that the mere listening to a servant of God or reading his writings is feeding on the Word. Not so! We “feed” on the Word only when we personally appropriate, masticate,¹³⁸ and assimilate into our lives what we hear or read. Where there is not an increasing conformity of heart and life to God’s Word, then increased knowledge will only bring increased condemnation! “And that servant, which knew his Lord’s will, and prepared not himself, neither did according to His will, shall be beaten with many stripes” (Luk 12:47).

“Ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth” (2Ti 3:7). This is one of the prominent characteristics of the “perilous times” in which we are now living. People hear one preacher after another, attend this conference and that conference, read book after book on biblical subjects, and yet never attain unto a vital and practical acquaintance with the Truth, so as to have an impression of its power and efficacy on the soul. There is such a thing as spiritual dropsy,¹³⁹ and multitudes are suffering from it. The more they hear, the more they want to: they drink in sermons and addresses with avidity¹⁴⁰ but their lives are unchanged. They are puffed up with their knowledge, not humbled into the dust before God. The faith of God’s elect is “the acknowledging [in the life] of the truth which is after godliness” (Tit 1:1), but to this the vast majority are total strangers.

God has given us His Word not only with the design of instructing us, but for the purpose of directing us: to make known what He requires us to do. The first thing we need is a clear and distinct knowledge of our duty; and the first thing God demands of us is a conscientious practice of it, corresponding to our knowledge. “What doeth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?” (Mic 6:8). “Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep His commandments: for this is the whole duty of man” (Ecc 12:13). The Lord Jesus affirmed the same thing when He said, “Ye are My friends, if you do whatsoever I command you” (Joh 15:14).

1. God’s Demands upon Man

A man profits from the Word as he discovers *God’s demands upon him*: His undeviating demand, for He changes not. It is a great and grievous mistake to suppose that in this present dispensation God has lowered His demands, for that would necessarily imply that His previous demand was a harsh and unrighteous one. Not so. “The law is holy, and the commandment holy, and just, and good” (Rom 7:12). The sum of God’s Law is, “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all

¹³⁸ **masticate** – to chew up completely.

¹³⁹ **dropsy** – an abnormal accumulation of fluid in the body, causing swelling.

¹⁴⁰ **avidity** – greedy and intense desire, craving.

thy might” (Deu 6:5); and the Lord Jesus repeated it in Matthew 22:37. The apostle Paul enforced the same when he wrote, “If any man love not the Lord Jesus, let him be Anathema”¹⁴¹ (1Co 16:22).

2. *Man’s Failure to Meet God’s Demands*

A man profits from the Word when he discovers *how entirely and how sinfully he has failed to meet God’s demands*. And let us point out for the benefit of any who may take issue with the last paragraph that no man can see what a sinner he is, how infinitely short he has fallen of measuring up to God’s standards, until he has a clear sight of the exalted demands of God upon him! Just in proportion as preachers lower God’s standard of what He requires from every human being, to that extent will their hearers obtain an inadequate and faulty conception of their sinfulness, and so the less will they perceive their need of an almighty Saviour! But once a soul really perceives what are God’s demands upon him, and how completely and constantly he has failed to render Him His due, then does he recognize what a desperate situation he is in. The Law must be preached before any are ready for the Gospel.

3. *God’s Provision for Meeting His Demands*

A man profits from the Word when he is taught therefrom that *God, in His infinite grace, has fully provided for His people’s meeting His own demands*. At this point, too, practically all present-day preaching is seriously defective. There is being given forth what may loosely be termed a “half Gospel,” but which in reality is virtually a denial of the true Gospel. Christ is brought in, yet only as a sort of make-weight.¹⁴² That Christ has vicariously met every demand of God upon all who believe upon Him is blessedly true, yet it is only a part of the truth. The Lord Jesus has not only vicariously satisfied for His people the requirements of God’s righteousness, but He has also secured that they shall personally satisfy them too. Christ has procured the Holy Spirit to make good in them what the Redeemer wrought for them.

The grand and glorious miracle of salvation is that the saved are regenerated. A transforming work is wrought within them: their understandings are illuminated, their hearts are changed, their wills are renewed. They are made “new creatures in Christ Jesus” (2Co 5:17). God refers to this miracle of grace thus: “I will put My laws into their mind and write them in their hearts” (Heb 8:10). The heart is now inclined to God’s law; a disposition has been communicated to it which answers to its demands; there is a sincere desire to perform it. And thus the quickened soul is able to say, “When Thou saidst, Seek ye My face; my heart said unto Thee, Thy face, Lord, will I seek” (Psa 27:8).

Christ not only rendered a perfect obedience unto the Law for the justification of His believing people, but He also merited for them those supplies of His Spirit which were essential unto their sanctification, and which alone could transform carnal creatures and

¹⁴¹ **anathema** – a person accursed or damned.

¹⁴² **make-weight** – something added to a scale to complete the required weight.

enable them to render acceptable obedience unto God. Though Christ died for the “ungodly” (Rom 5:6), though He finds them ungodly (Rom 4:5) when He justifies them, yet He leaves them not in that abominable state. On the contrary, He effectually teaches them by His Spirit to deny ungodliness and worldly lust (Tit 2:12). Just as weight cannot be separated from a stone, or heat from fire, so cannot justification and sanctification.

When God really pardons a sinner in the court of his conscience, under the sense of that amazing grace the heart is purified, the life is rectified, and the whole man is sanctified. Christ “gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto Himself a peculiar people, [not “careless about” but] zealous of good works” (Tit 2:19). Just as a substance and its properties, causes and their necessary effects are inseparably connected, so are a saving faith and conscientious obedience unto God. Hence we read of “the obedience of faith” (Rom 16:26).

Said the Lord Jesus, “He that hath My commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth Me” (Joh 14:21). Not in the Old Testament, the Gospels or the Epistles does God own anyone as a lover of Him save he who keeps His commandments. Love is something more than sentiment or emotion: it is a principle of action, and it expresses itself in something more than honeyed expressions, namely by deeds which please the object loved. “For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments” (1Jo 5:3). Oh, my reader, you are deceiving yourself if you think you love God and yet have no deep desire and make no real effort to walk obediently before Him.

But what is obedience to God? It is far more than a mechanical performance of certain duties. I may have been brought up by Christian parents, and under them acquire certain moral habits, and yet my abstaining from taking the Lord’s name in vain, and being guiltless of stealing, may be disobedience to the third and eighth commandments. Again, obedience to God is far more than conforming to the conduct of His people. I may board in a home where the Sabbath is strictly observed, and out of respect for them, or because I think it is good and wise course to rest one day in seven, I may refrain from all unnecessary labour on that day, and yet not keep the fourth commandment at all! Obedience is not only subjection to an external law, but it is the surrendering of my will to the authority of another. Thus, obedience to God is the heart’s recognition of His lordship: of His right to command, and my duty to comply. It is the complete subjection of the soul to the blessed yoke of Christ.

That obedience which God requires can proceed only from a heart which loves Him. “Whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord” (Col 3:23). That obedience which springs from a dread of punishment is servile. That obedience which is performed in order to procure favours from God is selfish and carnal. But spiritual and acceptable obedience is cheerfully given: it is the heart’s free response to and gratitude for the unmerited regard and love of God for us.

4. Loving God’s Commandments

We profit from the Word when we not only see it is our bounden duty to obey God, but *when there is wrought in us a love for His commandments*. The “blessed” man is the

one whose “delight is in the law of the Lord” (Psa 1:2). And again we read, “Blessed is the man that feareth the Lord, that delighteth greatly in His commandments” (Psa 112:1). It affords a real test for our hearts to face honestly the questions. Do I really value His “commandments” as much as I do His promises? Ought I not to do so? Assuredly, for the one proceed as truly from His love as do the other. The heart’s compliance with the voice of Christ is the foundation of all practical holiness.

Here again we would earnestly and lovingly beg the reader to attend closely to this detail. Any man who supposes that he is saved and yet has no genuine love of God’s commandment is deceiving himself. Said the Psalmist, “O how love I Thy law!” (Psa 119:97). And again, “Therefore I love Thy commandments above gold; yea, above fine gold” (Psa 119:127). Should someone object that that was under the Old Testament, we ask, Do you intimate that the Holy Spirit produces less a change in the hearts of those whom He now regenerates than He did of old? But a New Testament saint also placed on record, “I delight in the law of God after the inward man” (Rom 7:22). And, my reader, unless your heart delights in the “law of God” there is something radically wrong with you: yea, it is greatly to be feared that you are spiritually dead.

5. Yielding to God’s Commandments

A man profits from the Word when his heart and will are yielded to *all* God’s commandments. Partial obedience is no obedience at all. A holy mind declines whatsoever God forbids, and chooses to practice all He requires, without any exception. If our minds submit not unto God in all His commandments, we submit not to His authority in anything He enjoins. If we do not approve of our duty in its full extent, we are greatly mistaken if we imagine that we have any liking unto any part of it. A person who has no principle of holiness in him may yet be disinclined to many vices and be pleased to practice many virtues, as he perceives the former are unfit actions and the latter are, in themselves, comely actions, but his disapprobation¹⁴³ of vice and approbation of virtue arise not from any disposition to submit to the will of God.

True spiritual obedience is impartial. A renewed heart does not pick and choose from God’s commandments: the man who does so is not performing God’s will, but his own! Make no mistake upon this point; if we do not sincerely desire to please God in all things, then we do not truly wish to do so in anything. Self must be denied; not merely some of the things which may be craved, but self itself! A willful allowance of any known sin breaks the whole law (Jam 2:10-11). “Then shall I not be ashamed, when I have respect unto all Thy commandments” (Psa 119:6). Said the Lord Jesus, “Ye are My friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you” (Joh 15:14): if I am not His friend, then I must be His enemy, for there is no other alternative (see Luke 19:27).

¹⁴³ **disapprobation** – disapproval.

6. *Praying for Enabling Grace*

We profit from the Word when the soul is moved to *pray earnestly for enabling grace*. In regeneration the Holy Spirit communicates a nature which is fitted for obedience according to the Word. The heart has been won by God. There is now a deep and sincere desire to please Him. But the new nature possesses no inherent power, and the old nature or “flesh” strives against it, and the devil opposes. Thus, the Christian exclaims, “for to will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good I find not” (Rom 7:18). This does not mean that he is the slave of sin, as he was before conversion; but it means that he finds not how fully to realize his spiritual aspirations. Therefore does he pray, “Make me to go in the path of Thy commandments; for therein do I delight” (Psa 119:35). And again, “Order my steps in Thy Word and let not any iniquity have dominion over me” (Psa 119:133).

Here we would reply to a question which the above paragraphs have probably raised in many minds: Are you affirming that God requires perfect obedience from us in this life? We answer, Yes, God will not set any lower standard before us than that (1Pe 1:15). Then does the real Christian measure up to that standard? Yes and no. Yes, in his heart and it is at that which God looks (1Sa 16:7). In his heart every regenerated person has a real love for God’s commandments, and genuinely desires to keep all of them completely. It is in this sense, and this alone, that the Christian is experimentally “perfect.” The word “perfect,” both in the Old Testament (Job 1:1, Psa 37:37) and in the New Testament (Phi 3:15), means upright, sincere, in contrast with hypocritical.

“Lord, Thou hast heard the desire of the humble” (Psa 10:17). The “desires” of the saint are the language of his soul, and the promise is “He will fulfill the desire of them that fear Him” (Psa 145:19). The Christian’s desire is to obey God in all things, to be completely conformed to the image of Christ. But this will only be realized in the resurrection. Meanwhile, God for Christ’s sake graciously accepts the will for the deed (1Pe 3:5). He knows our hearts and sees in His child a genuine love for and a sincere desire to keep all His commandments, and accepts the fervent longing and cordial endeavour in lieu of an exact performance (2Co 8:12). But let none who are living in willful disobedience draw false peace and pervert to their own destruction what has just been said for the comfort of those who are heartily desirous of seeking to please God in all the details of their lives.

If any ask, How am I to know that my “desires” are really those of a regenerate soul? We answer, Saving grace is the communication to the heart of an habitual disposition unto holy acts. The “desires” of the reader are to be tested thus: Are they constant and continuous, or only by fits and starts? Are they earnest and serious, so that you really “hunger and thirst after righteousness” (Mat 5:6) and pant “after God” (Psa 42:1)? Are they operative and efficacious? Many desire to escape from hell, yet their desires are not sufficiently strong to bring them to hate and turn from that which must inevitably bring them to hell, namely willfully sinning against God. Many desire to go to heaven, but not so that they enter upon and follow that “narrow way” which alone leads thereto. True

spiritual “desires” use the means of grace and spare no pains to realize them, and continue prayerfully pressing forward unto the mark set before them.

7. *Enjoying Obedience*

We profit from the Word when we are, even now, enjoying the reward of obedience. “Godliness is profitable unto all things” (1Ti 4:8). By obedience we purify our souls (1Pe 1:22). By obedience we obtain the ear of God (1Jo 3:22), as disobedience is a barrier to our prayers (Isa 59:2; Jer 5:25). By obedience we obtain precious and intimate manifestations of Christ unto the soul (Joh 14:21). As we tread the path of wisdom (complete subjection to God), we discover that “her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace” (Pro 3:17). “His commandments are not grievous” (1Jo 5:3), and “in keeping of them there is great reward” (Psa 19:11). ❧

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The Doctrine of Sanctification

1. Introduction

In the ten articles published in 1934’s *Studies in the Scriptures* on “The Doctrine of Justification,”¹⁴⁴ we contemplated the transcendent¹⁴⁵ grace of God, which provided for His people a Surety,¹⁴⁶ Who kept for them perfectly His Holy Law and Who also endured the curse that was due to their manifold transgressions against it. In consequence thereof, though in ourselves we are criminals who deserve to be brought to the bar of God’s justice and there be sentenced to death, we are, nevertheless, by virtue of the accepted service of our Substitute, not only not condemned, but “justified,” that is, *pronounced righteous* in the high courts of heaven. Mercy has rejoiced against judgment, yet not

¹⁴⁴ **Justification** – “Justification is an act of God’s free grace, wherein He pardons all our sins (Rom 3:24; Eph 1:7) and accepts us as righteous in his sight (2Co 5:21), only for the righteousness of Christ (Rom 5:19) imputed to us and received by faith alone (Gal 2:16; Phi 3:9)” (*Spurgeon’s Catechism, Question 32; available from Chapel Library*).

¹⁴⁵ **transcendent** – being above and independent of the physical universe.

¹⁴⁶ **surety** – one that becomes responsible for another; especially for their debts. Here referring to Christ.

without the governmental righteousness of God, as expressed in His Holy Law, having been fully glorified.¹⁴⁷ The Son of God incarnate,¹⁴⁸ as the Federal Head¹⁴⁹ and representative of His people, obeyed it, and also suffered and died under its condemning sentence. The claims of God have been fully met, justice has been magnified, the Law has been made more honourable than if every descendant of Adam had personally fulfilled its requirements.

“As respects justifying righteousness, therefore, believers have nothing to do with the Law. They are justified ‘freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus’ (Rom 3:24), that is apart from any personal fulfillment thereof. We could neither fulfill its righteousness nor bear its curse. The claims of the Law were met and ended, once and forever, by the satisfaction of our great Substitute, and as a result we have attained to righteousness without works, i.e., without personal obedience of our own. ‘By the obedience of one shall many be made righteous’ (Rom 5:19). There may be indeed, and there are, other relations in which we stand to the Law. It is the principle of our new nature to rejoice in its holiness: ‘we delight in the law of God after the inner man.’ We know the comprehensiveness and the blessedness of those first two commandments on which all the Law and the Prophets hang: we know that ‘love’ is the fulfilling of the Law. We do not despise the guiding light of the holy and immutable¹⁵⁰ commandments of God, livingly embodied, as they have been, in the ways and character of Jesus—but we do not seek to obey them with any thought of obtaining justification thereby.

“That which *has been* attained, cannot remain to be attained. Nor do we place so great an indignity on ‘the righteousness of our God and Saviour,’ as to put the partial and imperfect obedience that we render *after* we are justified, on a level with that heavenly and perfect righteousness by which we *have been* justified. After we have been justified, grace may, and does for Christ’s sake, accept as well-pleasing our imperfect obedience—but this, being a consequence of our perfected justification, cannot be made a ground thereof. Nor can anything that is in the least degree imperfect be presented to God with the view of attaining justification. In respect of this, the courts of God admit nothing that falls short of His own absolute perfectness” (B.W. Newton).¹⁵¹

¹⁴⁷ **glorified** – to honor, praise, exalt.

¹⁴⁸ **incarnate** – of Christ taking flesh, that is, being made a true man.

¹⁴⁹ **Federal Head** – one who represents a group united to him (i.e., a President acting for a country united under a constitution). Here used of Christ Who represents His people, acts for them, and is united to them.

¹⁵⁰ **immutable** – unchangeable.

¹⁵¹ **Benjamin Willis Newton** (1807-1899) – pastor and writer. Born a Quaker, he turned to Anglicanism, but later joined John Darby and the Plymouth Brethren. He was involved in a sharp division with Darby and was accused of heresy. Brethrenism

Having, then, dwelt at some length on the basic and blessed truth of justification, it is fitting that we should now consider the closely connected and complementary Doctrine of Sanctification. But what is “sanctification”: is it a quality or position? Is sanctification a legal thing or an experimental; that is to say, is it something the believer has in Christ or in himself? Is it absolute or relative, by which we mean, does it admit of degree or no? Is it unchanging or progressive? Are we sanctified at the time we are justified, or is sanctification a later blessing? How is this blessing obtained: by something which is done for us, or by us, or both? How may one be assured he has been sanctified: what are the characteristics, the evidences, the fruits? How are we to distinguish between sanctification by the Father, sanctification by the Son, sanctification by the Spirit, sanctification by faith, sanctification by the Word?

Is there any difference between sanctification and holiness? If so, what? Are sanctification and purification the same thing? Does sanctification relate to the soul or the body, or both? What position does sanctification occupy in the *order* of divine blessings? What is the connection between regeneration and sanctification? What is the relation between justification and sanctification? Wherein does sanctification differ from glorification? Exactly what is the place of sanctification in regard to salvation: does it precede or follow, or is it an integral part of it? Why is there so much diversity of opinion upon these points, scarcely any two writers treating of this subject in the same manner?

Our purpose here is not simply to multiply questions but to indicate the many-sidedness of our present theme, and to intimate the various avenues of approach to the study of it.

Diverse indeed have been the answers returned to the above questions. Many who were ill-qualified for such a task have undertaken to write upon this weighty and difficult theme, rushing in where wiser men feared to tread. Others have superficially examined this subject through the coloured glasses of creedal¹⁵² attachment. Others, without any painstaking efforts of their own, have merely echoed predecessors who they supposed gave out the truth thereon. Though the present writer has been studying this subject off and on for upwards of 25 years, he has felt himself to be too immature and too unspiritual to write at length thereon; and even now, it is (he trusts) with fear and trembling he essays to do so. May it please the Holy Spirit to so guide his thoughts that he may be preserved from everything that would pervert the truth, dishonour God, or mislead His people. Brethren, pray for us!

divided into Open (Newton) and Exclusive (Darby) Brethren. After leaving the Plymouth Brethren, he planted an independent chapel in London and fellow-shipped with Strict Baptists. He was a prolific writer whose work was commended by George Muller of Bristol.

¹⁵² **creedal** — having to do with doctrinal creeds, confessions of faith, catechisms.

We have in our library discourses on this subject and treatises on this theme by over 50 different men, ancient and modern, ranging from hyper-Calvinists¹⁵³ to ultra-Arminians,¹⁵⁴ and a number who would not care to be listed under either. Some speak with pontifical¹⁵⁵ dogmatism, others with reverent caution, a few with humble diffidence. All of them have been carefully digested by us and diligently compared on the leading points. The present writer detests sectarianism (most of all in those who are the worst affected by it, while pretending to be opposed to it), and earnestly desires to be delivered from partisanship. He seeks to be profited from the labours of all, and freely acknowledges his indebtedness to men of various creeds and schools of thought. On some aspects of *this* subject he has found the Plymouth Brethren¹⁵⁶ much more helpful than the Reformers¹⁵⁷ and the Puritans.¹⁵⁸

Sanctification Is Important.

The great importance of our present theme is evidenced by the prominence that is given to it in Scripture: the words “holy, sanctified,” etc., occurring therein hundreds of times. Its importance also appears from the high value ascribed to it: it is the supreme glory of God, of the unfallen angels, of the Church. In Exodus 15:11 we read that the Lord God is “glorious in holiness”—that is His crowning excellency. In Matthew 25:31 mention is made of the “holy angels,” for no higher honor can be ascribed them. In Ephesians 5:26-27 we learn that the Church’s glory lieth not in pomp and outward adornment, but in holiness. Its importance further appears in that *this* is the aim in all God’s dispensations.¹⁵⁹ He elected¹⁶⁰ His people that they should be “holy” (Eph 1:4); Christ died that He might “sanctify” His people (Heb 13:12); chastisements are sent that we might be “partakers of God’s holiness” (Heb 12:10).

Whatever sanctification is, it is the great promise of the covenant made to Christ for His people. As Thomas Boston well said,

¹⁵³ **hyper-Calvinists** – people who believe there is no need to evangelize the lost, since God sovereignly will save His elect regardless of the actions of men.

¹⁵⁴ **Arminians** – those holding doctrines of Dutch theologian Jacobus Arminius (1560-1609), which included denial of unconditional election (contrary to Romans 9:11, etc.).

¹⁵⁵ **pontifical** – relating to the pontiff or pope, particularly his unwarranted claim to infallibility.

¹⁵⁶ **Plymouth Brethren** – assemblies seeking New Testament simplicity, begun in 19th century Britain. Generally, Arminian and dispensational in theology.

¹⁵⁷ **Reformers** – 16th century advocates of biblical doctrine, in contrast to Roman Catholic dogma, including Martin Luther and John Calvin.

¹⁵⁸ **Puritans** – 16th & 17th century proponents of biblical reform within the Church of England. Generally, Calvinistic.

¹⁵⁹ **dispensations** – ages; orderings of the affairs of the world.

¹⁶⁰ **elected** – chosen by God for salvation (Rom 9; Eph 1; etc.).

“Among the rest of that kind, it shines like the moon among the lesser stars—as the very chief subordinate end of the Covenant of Grace,¹⁶¹ standing therein next to the glory of God, which is the chief and ultimate end thereof. The promise of preservation, of the Spirit, of quickening¹⁶² the dead soul, of faith,¹⁶³ of justification, of reconciliation,¹⁶⁴ of adoption,¹⁶⁵ and of the enjoyment of God as our God, do tend unto it as their common center, and stand related to it as means to their end. They are all accomplished to sinners on design *to make them holy*.”

This is abundantly clear from, “The oath which He sware to our father Abraham, that He would grant unto us, that we being delivered out of the hand of our enemies might serve Him without fear, in holiness and righteousness before Him, all the days of our life” (Luk 1:73-75). In that “oath” or covenant, sworn to Abraham as a type¹⁶⁶ of Christ (our spiritual Father; Heb 2:13), His seed’s serving the Lord in holiness, is held forth as the *chief* thing sworn unto the Mediator¹⁶⁷—the deliverance from their spiritual enemies being a means to that end.

“The supreme excellency of sanctification is affirmed in Proverbs 8:11, ‘For wisdom is better than rubies; and all the things that may be desired are not to be compared to it.’ Everyone who has read the Book of Proverbs with any attention must have observed that Solomon means by ‘wisdom’ *holiness*, and by ‘folly’ *sin*; by a wise man a saint, and by a fool a sinner. ‘The wise shall inherit glory: but shame shall be the promotion of fools’ (Pro 3:35); who can doubt whether by ‘the wise’ he means *saints*, and by ‘fools’ *sinners*! ‘The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom’ (Pro 9:10), by which he means to assert that true ‘wisdom’ is true piety or real holiness. Holiness, then, is ‘better than rubies,’ and all things that are to be desired are not to be compared with it. It is hard to conceive how the inestimable worth and excellency of holiness could be painted in brighter colours

¹⁶¹ **covenant of grace** – a covenant is a promise (2Ch 21:7). The covenant of grace is the underlying promise of salvation inherent in and uniting various biblical promises (Gen 3:15, Gen 12:1-3, 2Sa 7:5-17, Jer 31:31-34, Gal 3).

¹⁶² **quickening** – life giving (Joh 5:21).

¹⁶³ **faith** – understanding and belief of the truth. Demonstrated by actions consistent with that truth (Mar 4:20; Mat 13:23; Luk 8:15; Joh 20:27).

¹⁶⁴ **reconciliation** – change in relationship from hostility to harmony.

¹⁶⁵ **adoption** – “adoption is an act of God’s free grace, whereby we are received into the number, and have a right to all the privileges, of the sons of God” (*Westminster Shorter Catechism*, Question 34).

¹⁶⁶ **type** – a pattern pointing to something greater.

¹⁶⁷ **Mediator** – one who intervenes between parties to make peace. “One mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus...” (1Ti 2:5).

than by comparing it to rubies—the richest and most beautiful objects in nature” (N. Emmons¹⁶⁸).

Sanctification Is Supernatural.

Not only is true sanctification an important, essential, and unspeakably precious thing, it is wholly *supernatural*.

“It is our duty to enquire into the nature of evangelical holiness, as it is a fruit or effect in us of the Spirit of sanctification, because it is abstruse¹⁶⁹ and mysterious, and undiscernible unto the eye of carnal reason. We say of it in some sense as Job of wisdom, ‘whence then cometh wisdom? and where is the place of understanding? Seeing it is hid from the eyes of all living, and kept close from the fowls of the air. Destruction and death say, We have heard the fame thereof with our ears. God understandeth the way thereof, and He knoweth the place thereof. And unto man He said, Behold, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom; and to depart from evil is understanding’ (Job 28:20-23, 28). This is that wisdom whose ways, residence, and paths are so hidden from the natural reason and understandings of men.

“No man, I say, by mere sight and conduct, can know and understand aright the true nature of evangelical holiness; and it is, therefore, no wonder if the doctrine of it be despised by many as an enthusiastical fancy.¹⁷⁰ It is of the things of the Spirit of God; yea, it is the principal effect of all His operation in us and towards us. And ‘the things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God’ (1Co 2:11). It is by Him alone that we are enabled to ‘know the things that are freely given to us of God’ (v. 12) as this is, if ever we receive anything of Him in this world, or shall do so to eternity. ‘Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him’; the comprehension of these things is not the work of any of our natural faculties, but ‘God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit’ (1Co 2:9-10).

“Believers themselves are oft-times much unacquainted with it, either as to their apprehension of its true nature, causes, and effects, or, at least, as to their *own in-*

¹⁶⁸ **Nathaniel Emmons** (1745-1840) – American pastor and theologian who exerted a strong influence in New England. Associated with the movement that came to be known as the “New England Theology,” “New Theology,” “New Divinity,” or “Hopkinsianism” (after Samuel Hopkins). Though Jonathan Edwards has been said to be the source of this development, some that followed him fell into tragic error. Nathaniel Emmons was among them. In his sermon *Duty of Sinners to Make a New Heart*, he *explicitly* denies the miraculous nature of the new birth and *practically* denies the doctrine of total depravity (see the section of this sermon titled “Improvement”). Let the reader take warning.

¹⁶⁹ **abstruse** – difficult to understand or comprehend.

¹⁷⁰ **enthusiastical fancy** – irrational desire.

*terests*¹⁷¹ and concernment therein. As we know not of ourselves the things that are wrought in us of the Spirit of God, so we seldom attend as we ought unto His instruction of us in them. It may seem strange indeed, that, whereas all believers are sanctified and made holy, that they should not understand nor apprehend what is wrought in them and for them, and what abideth with them. But, alas, how little do we know of ourselves, of what we are, and whence are our powers and faculties even in things natural. Do we know how the members of the body are fashioned in the womb?” (John Owen¹⁷²).

Clear proof that true sanctification is wholly supernatural and altogether beyond the understanding of the unregenerate, is found in the fact that so many are thoroughly deceived and fatally deluded by fleshly imitations and satanic substitutes of real holiness. It would be outside our present scope to describe in detail the various pretensions which pose as gospel holiness, but the poor Papists,¹⁷³ taught to look up to the “saints” canonized¹⁷⁴ by their “church,” are by no means the only ones who are mislead in this vital matter. Were it not that God’s Word reveals so clearly the power of that darkness which

¹⁷¹ **interests** – share, participation.

¹⁷² **John Owen** (1616-1683) – English clergyman, pastor, chaplain to Oliver Cromwell, dean of Christ Church Oxford, Vice-Chancellor of Oxford, preacher, Congregationalist, and voluminous author (his works have been published in 16 volumes, seven more for his work on the *Epistle of Hebrews*). Educated at Oxford, he was driven from this institution by the statues of Archbishop William Laud. He took the side of Parliament on the occasion of the English civil war. This resulted in him losing his position and prospect of receiving his Royalist uncle’s fortune. Cromwell took him as chaplain to both Ireland and Scotland. As Vice-Chancellor of Oxford, he was noted for his impartiality. This impartiality resulted in a disagreement with Cromwell over this leader’s taking the Protectorate. He had a significant role in the conference of Independents that prepared the Savoy Declaration (Congregational declaration of faith). After the restoration of the monarchy, driven this time by the *Conventicle* and *Five Mile Acts*, Owen went to London. He protested the *Conventicle Acts* to the House of Lords and sought the release of John Bunyan, which was granted. He was offered, but declined, an invitation to the ministry in Boston. He declined as well the presidency of Harvard College. He and his wife Mary had eleven children, ten of which died in infancy. He has been called “...the greatest theologian who has ever written in the English language” (Roger Nicole). Regarding his view of the ministry, Owen once said, “A minister may fill his pews, his communion roll, the mouths of the public—but what that minister is on his knees in secret before God Almighty, that he is and no more”.

¹⁷³ **papists** – those loyal to the Pope, Roman Catholics.

¹⁷⁴ **canonized** - among Roman Catholics, the recognition of a deceased person as a “saint.” According to Scripture, all His people are saints (Rom 1:7; 8:27; 1Co 1:2; Eph 1:1; Col 1:2; Deu 3:1-3; Psa 89:7; 148:14; Act 9:13; 26:10).

rests on the understanding of all who are not taught by the Spirit, it would be surprising beyond words to see so many intelligent people supposing that holiness consists in abstinence from human comforts, garbing themselves in mean¹⁷⁵ attire, and practicing various austerities that God has never commanded.

Sanctification Is Revealed in the Scriptures.

Spiritual sanctification can only be rightly apprehended from what God has been pleased to reveal thereon *in His Holy Word*, and can only be experimentally known by the gracious operations of the Holy Spirit. We can arrive at no accurate conceptions of this blessed subject except as our thoughts are formed by the teaching of Scripture, and we can only experience the power of the same as the Inspirer of those Scriptures is pleased to write them upon our hearts. Nor can we obtain so much as a correct idea of the meaning of the term “sanctification” by limiting our attention to a few verses in which the word is found, or even to a whole class of passages of a similar nature; there must be a painstaking examination of *every* occurrence of the term and also of its related words. Only thus shall we be preserved from the entertaining of a one-sided, inadequate, and misleading view of its fullness and many-sidedness.

Even a superficial examination of the Scriptures will reveal that holiness is *the opposite of sin*, yet the realization of this at once conducts us into the realm of mystery, for how can persons be sinful and holy at one and the same time? It is this difficulty which so deeply exercises the true saints: they perceive in themselves so much carnality, filth, and vileness that they find it almost impossible to believe that *they* are HOLY. Nor is the difficulty solved here, as it was in justification, by saying, Though we are completely unholy in ourselves, we *are* holy *in Christ*. We must not here anticipate the ground that we hope to cover in future articles, except to say, the Word of God clearly teaches that those who have been sanctified by God *are* holy *in themselves*. The Lord graciously prepare our hearts for what is to follow.

2. Its Meaning

Justification and Sanctification

Having dwelt at some length (in the articles on justification) upon the relative or legal change that takes place in the *status* of God’s people at justification, it is fitting that we should now proceed to consider the real and experimental¹⁷⁶ change that takes place in their *state*, which change is begun at their sanctification and made perfect in Glory. Though the justification and the sanctification of the believing sinner may be, and should be, contemplated singly and distinctively, yet they are inseparably connected, God never bestowing the one without the other—in fact we have no way or means whatsoever of knowing the former apart from the latter. In seeking to arrive at the meaning of the second, it will therefore be of help to examine its relation to the first. “These indi-

¹⁷⁵ **mean** – poor; base; shabby.

¹⁷⁶ **experimental** – empirical; experiential.

vidual companions, sanctification and justification, must not be disjoined: under the Law the ablutions and oblations went together, the washings and the sacrifices” (T. Manton).¹⁷⁷

There are two principal effects that sin produces, which cannot be separated: the filthy defilement it causes, the awful guilt it entails. Thus, salvation from sin necessarily requires both a cleansing and a clearing of the one who is to be saved. Again, there are two things absolutely indispensable in order for any creature to dwell with God in heaven: a valid title to that inheritance, a personal fitness to enjoy such blessedness—the one is given in justification, the other is commenced in sanctification. The inseparability of the two things are brought out in, “In the LORD have I righteousness and strength” (Isa 45:24); “but of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption” (1Co 1:30); “but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified” (1Co 6:11); “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, *and to cleanse us* from all unrighteousness” (1Jo 1:9).

“These blessings walk hand in hand; and never were, never will be, never can be parted. No more than the delicious scent can be separated from the beautiful bloom of the rose or carnation; let the flower be expanded, and the fragrance transpires. Try, if you can, to separate gravity from the stone, or heat from the fire. If these bodies and their essential properties, if these causes and their necessary effects, are indissolubly connected, so are our justification and our sanctification” (James Hervey,¹⁷⁸ 1770).

“Like as Adam alone did personally break the first covenant by the all-ruining offense, yet they to whom his guilt is imputed do thereupon become inherently sinful, through the corruption of nature conveyed to them from him; so Christ alone

¹⁷⁷ **Thomas Manton** (1620-1677) – English Puritan, presbyterian, preacher, author. Participated in the Westminster Assembly and served under Oliver Cromwell. Was appointed lecturer at Westminster Abbey, and Rector of St. Paul’s in Covent Garden. He opposed the execution of Charles I, participated in the Savoy Convention, and supported the restoration of Charles II. He resigned his position at St. Paul’s due to the attack of Reformed principles under the *Act of Uniformity*, yet still continued to minister. He was imprisoned for violation of the *Conventicle Act*, yet continued to write. He had a wife and 3 children that survived him. J. C. Ryle said, “Manton was a Calvinist in his theology...He maintained and taught personal election, the perseverance of the saints, the absolute necessity of a regeneration evidenced by its fruits—as well as salvation by free grace, justification by faith alone...As an expositor of Scripture, I regard Manton with unmingled admiration.”

¹⁷⁸ **James Hervey** (1714-1758) – English clergyman, writer, and contemporary of George Whitefield and John Wesley. A Calvinist, he remained in the Church of England. It was said he made a lasting impact on art by his influence upon English poet and painter William Blake (author of *The Tyger*).

did perform the condition of the second covenant,¹⁷⁹ and those to whom His righteousness is imputed¹⁸⁰ do thereupon become inherently righteous, through inherent grace communicated to them from Him by the Spirit. ‘For if by one man’s offense death reigned by one; much more they which receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness shall reign in life by one, Jesus Christ’ (Rom 5:17). How did death reign by Adam’s offense? Not only in point of guilt, whereby his posterity were bound over to destruction, but also in point of their being dead to all good, dead in trespasses and sins. Therefore, the receivers of the gift of righteousness must thereby be brought to reign in life—not only legally in justification, but also morally in sanctification” (T. Boston,¹⁸¹ 1690).

Though absolutely inseparable, yet these two great blessings of divine grace are quite distinct. In sanctification something is actually *imparted* to us, in justification it is only *imputed*. Justification is based entirely upon the work Christ wrought *for* us, sanctification is principally a work wrought *in* us. Justification respects its object in a legal sense, and terminates in a relative change—a deliverance from punishment, a right to the reward. Sanctification regards its object in a moral sense, and terminates in an experimental change both in character and conduct—imparting a love for God, a capacity to worship Him acceptably, and a meetness¹⁸² for heaven. Justification is by a righteousness *without* us,¹⁸³ sanctification is by a holiness wrought *in* us. Justification is by Christ as Priest and has regard to the penalty of sin; sanctification is by Christ as King and has regard to the dominion of sin—the former cancels its damning power, the latter delivers from its reigning power.

They differ, then, in their *order* (not of time, but in their nature): justification preceding, sanctification following; the sinner is pardoned and restored to God’s favour before the Spirit is given to renew him after His image. They differ in their *design*: justification removes the obligation unto punishment; sanctification cleanses from pollution. They differ in their *form*: justification is a judicial act by which the sinner is pro-

¹⁷⁹ **second covenant** – that is, the new covenant. “And to Jesus the mediator of the new covenant...” (Heb 12:24). “For this is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins” (Mat 26:28).

¹⁸⁰ **imputed** – to have credited, assigned, ascribed, accounted, reckoned to another.

¹⁸¹ **Thomas Boston** (1676-1732) – Scottish church leader and author. His parents were Covenanters and his father was imprisoned for a time for the faith. As a boy, was awakened under the preaching of Henry Erskine (father of Ebenezer and Ralph). *Human Nature in its Fourfold State* and *The Crook in the Lot* are some of his many works.

¹⁸² **meetness** – suitableness.

¹⁸³ **without us** – outside us: “And be found in him, *not having mine own righteousness*, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith...” (Phi 3:9).

nounced righteous; sanctification is a moral work by which the sinner is made holy—the one has to do solely with our standing before God, the other chiefly concerns our state. They differ in their *cause*: the one issuing from the merits of Christ's satisfaction, the other proceeding from the efficacy¹⁸⁴ of the same. They differ in their *end*: the one bestowing a title to everlasting Glory, the other being the highway that conducts us there.

Definition of Sanctification

The words “holiness” and “sanctification” are used in our English Bible to represent one and the same word in the Hebrew and Greek originals, but they are by no means used with a uniform signification, being employed with quite a varied latitude and scope. Hence it is hardly to be wondered at that theologians have framed so many different definitions of their meaning. Among them we may cite the following, each of which, save the last, having an element of truth in them. “Sanctification is Godlikeness, or being renewed after His image.” “Holiness is conformity to the Law of God, in heart and life.” “Sanctification is a freedom from the tyranny of sin, into the liberty of righteousness.” “Sanctification is that work of the Spirit whereby we are fitted to be worshipers of God.” “Holiness is a process of cleansing from the pollution of sin.” “It is a moral renovation of our natures whereby they are made more and more like Christ.” “Sanctification is the total eradication of the carnal nature, so that sinless perfection is attained in this life” [this definition is patently untrue].

Another class of writers, held in high repute in certain circles, and whose works now have a wide circulation, have formed a faulty, or at least very inadequate, definition of the word “sanctify,” through limiting themselves to a certain class of passages where the term occurs, and making deductions from only one set of facts. For example, not a few have cited verse after verse in the Old Testament where the word “holy” is applied to inanimate objects, like the vessels of the tabernacle, and then have argued that the term itself *cannot* possess a *moral* value. But that is false reasoning; it would be like saying that because we read of the “everlasting hills” (Gen 49:26) and the “everlasting mountains” (Hab 3:6) that therefore *God* cannot be “everlasting”—which is the line of logic(?) employed by many of the Universalists¹⁸⁵ so as to set aside the truth of the everlasting punishment of the wicked.

Words must first be used of *material* objects before we are ready to employ them in a higher and abstract sense. All our ideas¹⁸⁶ are admitted through the medium of physical senses, and consequently refer in the first place to external objects. But as the intellect develops we apply those names, given to material things, unto those which are immate-

¹⁸⁴ **efficacy** – power; effectiveness.

¹⁸⁵ **Universalists** – people who believe that there is no hell and that God will save all men from the just punishment of their sins.

¹⁸⁶ **ideas** – those interested in a different understanding of knowledge (epistemology) than that described in this section may consider *Lord God of Truth* by Gordon Clark and *Concerning the Teacher* by Aurelius Augustine.

rial. In the earliest stages of human history, God dealt with His people according to this principle. It is true that God's sanctifying of the Sabbath day teaches us that the first meaning of the word is "to set apart," but to argue from this that the term *never* has a moral force when it is applied to moral agents is not worthy of being called "reasoning"—it is a mere begging of the question: as well argue that since in a majority of passages "baptism" has reference to the immersion of a person in water, it can never have a mystical or spiritual force and value, which is contradicted by Luke 12:50 and 1 Corinthians 12:13.

The outward ceremonies prescribed by God to the Hebrews with regard to their external form of religious service, were all designed to teach corresponding inward duties, and to show the obligation unto moral virtues. But so determined are many of our moderns to empty the word "sanctify" of all moral value, they quote such verses as "for their sakes I sanctify myself" (Joh 17:19): and inasmuch as there was no sin in the Lord Jesus from which He needed cleansing, have triumphantly concluded that the thought of moral purification *cannot* enter into the meaning of the word when it is applied to His people. This also is a serious error—what the lawyers would call "special pleading":¹⁸⁷ with just as much reason might we insist the word "tempt" can never signify to solicit and incline to evil, because it cannot mean *that* when used of Christ in Matthew 4:1 and Hebrews 4:15!

Its Meaning in Scripture

The only satisfactory way of ascertaining the meaning or meanings of the word "sanctify" is to carefully examine *every* passage in which it is found in Holy Writ, studying its setting, weighing any term with which it is contrasted, observing the objects or persons to which it is applied. This calls for much patience and care, yet only thus do we obey that exhortation "prove all things" (1Th 5:21). That this term denotes more than simply "to separate" or "set apart," is clear from Numbers 6:8, where it is said of the Nazarite, "all the days of his separation he is holy unto the LORD," for according to some that would merely signify "all the days of his separation he is *separated* unto the Lord," which would be meaningless redundancy. So again, of the Lord Jesus we are told that He was "*holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners*" (Heb 7:26), which shows that "holy" means something more than "separation."

That the word "sanctify" (or "holy"—the *same* Hebrew or Greek term) is far from being used in an uniform sense is clear from the following passages. In Isaiah 66:17 it is said of certain wicked men, "They that sanctify themselves, and purify themselves in the gardens behind one tree in the midst, eating swine's flesh." In Isaiah 13:3 God said of the Medes, whom He had appointed to overthrow the Babylonian empire, "I have commanded my sanctified ones, I have also called my mighty ones for mine anger." When applied

¹⁸⁷ **special pleading** — judging the character of one party and applying the conclusion to the second party. The second party is exempted in determining the proper conclusion.

to God Himself, the term denotes His ineffable¹⁸⁸ majesty, “Thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy” (Isa 57:15; cf. Psa 99:3, Hab 3:3). It also includes the thought of adorning and equipping: “thou shalt anoint it, to sanctify it” (Exo 29:36; cf. 40:11); “anointed him, to sanctify him” (Lev 8:12; cf. v. 30), “If a man therefore purge himself from these, he shall be a vessel unto honour, sanctified, *and meet for the Master’s use*” (2Ti 2:21).

That the word “holy” or “sanctify” has in many passages a reference to a *moral quality* is clear from such verses as the following: “Wherefore the law is holy, and the commandment holy, and just, and good” (Rom 7:12)—each of these predicates are moral qualities. Among the identifying marks of a scriptural bishop are that he must be “a lover of hospitality, a lover of good men, sober, just, holy, temperate” (Ti 1:8)—each of those are moral qualities, and the very connection in which the term “holy” is there found proves conclusively it means much more than an external “setting apart.” “As ye have yielded your members servants to uncleanness and to iniquity unto iniquity; even so now yield your members servants to righteousness unto holiness” (Rom 6:19); here the word “holiness” is used antithetically to “uncleanness.” So again in 1 Corinthians 7:14, “else were your children *unclean*; but now are they *holy*,” i.e., maritally pure.

That sanctification includes *cleansing* is clear from many considerations. It may be seen in the types, “Go unto the people, and *sanctify* them to day and to morrow, and let them *wash* their clothes” (Exo 19:10)—the latter being an emblem of the former. As we have seen in Romans 6:19 and 1 Corinthians 7:14, it is the *opposite* of “uncleanness.” So also in 2 Timothy 2:21 the servant of God is to *purge* himself from “the vessels to dishonour” (worldly, fleshly, and apostate preachers and churches),¹⁸⁹ if he is to be “sanctified” and “meet for the Master’s use.” In Ephesians 5:26 we are told that Christ gave Himself for the Church, “that he might *sanctify and cleanse it*,” and that, in order that He “might present it to Himself a glorious Church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but [in contrast from such blemishes] that it should be *holy*” (v. 27). “If the blood of bulls and of goats, and the ashes of an heifer sprinkling the unclean, sanctifieth to the purifying of the flesh” (Heb 9:13)—what could be plainer: ceremonial¹⁹⁰ sanctification under the Law was secured by a process of purification or cleansing!

“Purification is the first proper notion of internal real sanctification. To be unclean absolutely, and to be holy, are universally opposed. Not to be purged from sin is an expression of an unholy person, as to be cleansed is of him that is holy. This purification is ascribed unto all the causes and means of sanctification. Not that sanctification consists wholly herein, but firstly and necessarily it is required

¹⁸⁸ **ineffable** – unspeakable; beyond one’s capacity to comprehensively or adequately articulate.

¹⁸⁹ **dishonour** – in 2Ti 2:20, ignominy, disgrace.

¹⁹⁰ **ceremonial** – pertaining to the worship connected with the Old Testament Tabernacle and Temple (see Hebrews 8-9).

thereunto: ‘Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean: from all your filthiness, and from all your idols, will I cleanse you’ (Eze 36:25). That this sprinkling of clean water upon us is the communication of the Spirit unto us for the end designed, I have been evinced.¹⁹¹ It hath also been declared wherefore He is called ‘water’ or compared thereunto. Verse 27 shows expressly that it is the Spirit of God which is intended: ‘I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes.’ And that which He is thus in the first place promised for, is the cleansing of us from the pollution of sin, which, in order of nature, is proposed unto His enabling us to walk in God’s statutes” (John Owen).

To sanctify, then, means in the great majority of instances to appoint, dedicate, or set apart unto God, for a holy and special use. Yet that act of separation is not a bare change of situation, so to speak, but is preceded or accompanied by a work which (ceremonially or experimentally) *fits* the person for God. Thus the priests in their sanctification (Lev 8) were sanctified by washing in water (type of regeneration: Titus 3:5), having the blood applied to their persons (type of justification: Romans 5:9), and being anointed with oil (type of receiving the Holy Spirit: 1 John 2:20, 27). As the term is applied to Christians it is used to designate three things, or three parts of one whole: first, the *process* of setting them apart unto God or constituting them holy: Hebrews 13:12; 2 Thessalonians 2:3. Second, the *state* or condition of holy separation into which they are brought: 1 Corinthians 1:2; Ephesians 4:24. Third, the personal sanctity or *holy living* that proceeds from the state: Luke 1:75; 1 Peter 1:15.

To revert again to the Old Testament types (which are generally the best interpreters of the doctrinal statements of the New Testament, providing we carefully bear in mind that the antitype¹⁹² is always of a higher order and superior nature to what prefigured it, as the substance must excel the shadow, the inward and spiritual surpassing the merely outward and ceremonial), “Sanctify unto me all the firstborn...*it is mine*” (Exo 13:2). This comes immediately after the deliverance of the firstborn by the blood of the paschal¹⁹³ lamb in the preceding chapter: first justification, and then sanctification as the complementary parts of one whole.

“Ye shall therefore put difference between clean beasts and unclean, and between unclean fowls and clean: and ye shall not make your souls abominable by beast, or by fowl, or by any manner of living thing that creepeth on the ground, which I have separated from you as unclean. And ye shall be holy unto me: for I the LORD am holy, and have severed you from other people, that ye should *be mine*” (Lev 20:25-26).

Here we see there was a separation *from* all that is unclean, with an unreserved and exclusive devotement *to* the Lord.

¹⁹¹ **evinced** – shown clearly.

¹⁹² **antitype** – that which is foreshadowed by a previous symbol.

¹⁹³ **paschal** – associated with Passover.

3a. Its Necessity, Part One

Introduction

It is our earnest desire to write on the doctrine of sanctification not in a theological or merely abstract way, but in a *practical* manner:¹⁹⁴ in such a way that it may please the Lord to speak through it to our needy hearts and search our benumbed consciences. It is a most important branch of our subject, yet one from which we are prone to shrink, being very unpalatable to the flesh. Having been shapen in iniquity and conceived in sin (Psa 51:5), our hearts *naturally* hate holiness, being opposed to any experimental acquaintance with the same. As the Lord Jesus told the religious leaders of His day, “This is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light” (Joh 3:19), which may justly be paraphrased “men loved sin rather than holiness”—for in Scripture “darkness” is the emblem of sin, the evil one being denominated “the power of darkness” (Luk 22:53), as “light” is the emblem of the ineffably Holy One (1Jo 1:5).

But though by nature man is opposed to the Light, it is written, “Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord” (Heb 12:14). To the same effect the Lord Jesus declared, “Blessed are the pure in heart: for *they* shall see God” (Mat 5:8). God will not call unto nearness with Himself those who are carnal and corrupt. “Can two walk together, except they be agreed?” (Amo 3:3); what concord can there be between an unholy soul and the thrice holy God? Our God is “glorious in holiness” (Exo 15:11), and therefore those whom He separates unto Himself must be suited to Himself, and be made “partakers of his holiness” (Heb 12:10). The whole of His ways with man exhibit this principle, and His Word continually proclaims that He is “not a God that hath pleasure in wickedness: neither shall evil dwell with thee” (Psa 5:4).

By our fall in Adam, we lost not only the favour of God but also the purity of our natures, and therefore we need to be both reconciled¹⁹⁵ to God *and* sanctified in our inner man. There is now a spiritual leprosy spread over all our nature, which makes us loathsome to God and puts us into a state of separation from Him. No matter what pains the sinner takes to be rid of his horrible disease, he does but hide and not cleanse it. Adam concealed neither his nakedness nor the shame of it by his fig-leaf contrivance;¹⁹⁶ so those who have no covering for their natural filthiness other than the externals of religion, rather proclaim than hide it! Make no mistake on this score: neither the outward profession of Christianity nor the doing of a few good works will give us access to the thrice Holy One. Unless we are washed by the Holy Spirit, and in the blood of Christ, from our native pollutions,¹⁹⁷ we cannot enter the kingdom of Glory.

¹⁹⁴ **practical** — biblical theology is practical (Rom 12:1-2; Ti 2:11-15)!

¹⁹⁵ **reconciled** — to have one’s relationship with God changed from estrangement, due to sin, to peace by Jesus Christ (2Co 5:18-21).

¹⁹⁶ **fig-leaf contrivance** — see Genesis 3:1-8.

¹⁹⁷ **native pollutions** — natural sinfulness.

Alas, with what forms of godliness, outward appearances, external embellishments are most people satisfied. How they mistake the shadows for the substance, the means for the end itself. How many devout Laodiceans¹⁹⁸ are there who *know not* that they are “wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked” (Rev 3:17). No preaching affects them; nothing will bring them to exclaim with the prophet, “O my God, I am ashamed and blush to lift up my face to thee, my God” (Ezr 9:6). No, if they do but preserve themselves from the known guilt of such sins as are punishable among men, to all other things their conscience seems dead: they have no inward shame for anything between their souls and God, especially not for the depravity and defilement of their natures—of *that* they know, feel, bewail nothing!

“There is a generation that are pure in their own eyes, and yet is not washed from their filthiness” (Pro 30:12). Although they had never been cleansed by the Holy Spirit, nor their hearts purified by faith (Act 15:9), yet they esteemed themselves to be pure, and had not the least sense of their foul defilement. Such a generation were the self-righteous Pharisees of Christ’s day: they were constantly cleansing their hands and cups, engaged in an interminable round of ceremonial washings, yet were they thoroughly ignorant of the fact that *within* they were filled with all manner of defilement (Mat 23:25-28). So is a generation of church-goers today; they are orthodox in their views, reverent in their demeanor, regular in their contributions, but they make no conscience of the state of their hearts.

That sanctification or personal holiness that we here desire to show the absolute necessity of, lies in or consists of three things. *First*, that internal change or renovation of our souls whereby our minds, affections, and wills are brought into harmony with God. *Second*, that impartial compliance with the revealed will of God in all duties of obedience and abstinence from evil, issuing from a principle of faith and love. *Third*, that directing of all our actions unto the glory of God, by Jesus Christ, according to the gospel. This, and nothing short of this, is evangelical¹⁹⁹ and saving sanctification. The heart must be changed so as to be brought into conformity with God’s nature and will: its motives, desires, thoughts and actions require to be purified. There must be a spirit of holiness working within so as to sanctify our outward performances if they are to be acceptable unto Him in Whom “there is no darkness at all.”

Evangelical holiness consists not only in external works of piety and charity, but in pure thoughts, impulses and affections of the soul, chiefly in that disinterested²⁰⁰ love from which all good works must flow if they are to receive the approbation²⁰¹ of heaven. Not only must there be an abstinence from the execution of sinful lusts, but there must

¹⁹⁸ **Laodiceans** — see Revelation 3:14-22.

¹⁹⁹ **evangelical** — having to do with the gospel.

²⁰⁰ **disinterested** — not inordinately “interested” or preoccupied with one’s own agenda to the neglect of Christ and the will of God.

²⁰¹ **approbation** — approval, blessing, praise, commendation.

be a loving and delighting to do the will of God in a cheerful manner, obeying Him without repining²⁰² or grudging against any duty, as if it were a grievous yoke to be borne. Evangelical sanctification is that holiness of heart which causes us to love God supremely, so as to yield ourselves wholly up to His constant service in all things—to His disposal of us as our absolute Lord, whether it be for prosperity or adversity, for life or death—and to love our neighbours as ourselves.

This entire sanctification of our whole inner and outer man is absolutely indispensable. As there must be a change of *state* before there can be of *life*—“make the tree good, and his fruit [will be] good” (Mat 12:33)—so there must be sanctification before there can be glorification.²⁰³ Unless we are purged from the pollution of sin, we can never be fit for communion²⁰⁴ with God. “And there shall in no wise enter into it [the eternal dwelling place of God and His people] any thing that defileth, neither whatsoever worketh abomination” (Rev 21:27). “To suppose that an unpurged sinner can be brought into the blessed enjoyment of God, is to overthrow both the Law and the gospel, and to say that Christ died in vain.”²⁰⁵ Personal holiness is equally imperative as the forgiveness of sins in order to eternal bliss.

Plain and convincing as should be the above statements, there is a class of professing Christians who wish to regard the justification of the believer as constituting almost the whole of his salvation, instead of its being only one aspect thereof. Such people delight to dwell upon the imputed righteousness of Christ, but they evince little or no concern about personal holiness. On the other hand, there are not a few who, in their reaction from a one-sided emphasis upon justification by grace through faith alone, have gone to the opposite extreme, making sanctification the sum and substance of all their thinking and preaching. Let it be solemnly realized that, while a man may learn thoroughly the scriptural doctrine of justification and yet not be *himself* justified before God, so he may be able to detect the crudities and errors of “the Holiness people,”²⁰⁶ and yet be completely unsanctified himself. But it is chiefly the first of these two errors we now desire to expose, and we cannot do better than quote at length from Walter Marshall, who has most helpfully dealt with it.

²⁰² **repining** – expressing discontent.

²⁰³ **glorification** – the culminating work of God whereby believers are conformed to the image of Christ in their bodies: they shall see Him and be like Him (2Co 3:18; Col 1:27; Rom 8:28-30; 1Jo 3:2-3; Psa 17:15; Phi 3:20-21; 1Co 15:42-58).

²⁰⁴ **communion** – fellowship.

²⁰⁵ John Owen, *Complete Works of John Owen* (Banner of Truth Trust), Vol. 2, 511.

²⁰⁶ **“the Holiness people”** – the author may here refer to those professing Christians which have adopted very visible outward practices, some Biblical and some not, which they equate to being sanctified. These practices may often be accompanied by serious doctrinal deficiencies.

If We Are Justified, We Will Desire to Be Sanctified.

“We are to look upon holiness as a very necessary *part* of that salvation that is received by faith in Christ. Some are so drenched in a covenant of works that they accuse us of making good works needless to salvation, if we will not acknowledge them to be necessary, either as *conditions to procure* an interest in Christ, or as *preparatives to fit us* for receiving Him by faith. And others, when they are taught by the Scriptures that we are saved by faith, even by faith without works, do begin to disregard all obedience to the Law as not at all necessary to salvation, and do account themselves obliged to it only in point of gratitude—if it be wholly neglected, they doubt not but free grace will save them nevertheless. Yea, some are given up to such strong Antinomian²⁰⁷ delusions, that they account it a part of the liberty from bondage of the Law purchased by the blood of Christ, to make no conscience of breaking the Law in their conduct.

“One cause of these errors that are so contrary one to the other, is that many are prone to imagine nothing else to be meant by ‘salvation’ but to be delivered from hell and to enjoy heavenly happiness and glory. Hence they conclude that, if good works be a *means* of glorification, and precedent to it, they must also be precedent means of our whole salvation, and that, if they be not a necessary means of our *whole* salvation, they are not at all necessary to glorification. But though ‘salvation’ be often taken in Scripture by way of *eminency* for its perfection in the state of heavenly Glory, yet, according to its full and proper signification, we are to understand by it all that freedom from the evil of our natural corrupt state, and all those holy and happy enjoyments that we receive from Christ our Saviour—either in this world by faith or in the world to come by glorification. Thus justification, the gift of the Spirit to dwell in us, [and] the privilege of adoption [deliverance from the reigning power of indwelling sin] are *parts* of our ‘salvation’ that we partake of in this life. Thus also, the conformity of our hearts to the Law of God, and the fruits of righteousness with which we are filled by Jesus Christ in this life, are *necessary parts* of our ‘salvation.’

“God saveth us from our sinful uncleanness here by the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit (Eze 36:29; Ti 3:5), as well as from hell hereafter. Christ was called Jesus, i.e., a Saviour, because He saves His people from their sins (Mat 1:21). Therefore, deliverance from our sins is *part* of our ‘salvation,’ which is begun in this life by justification and sanctification, and perfected by glorification in the life to come. Can we rationally doubt whether it be any proper part of our salvation by Christ to be quickened, so as to be enabled to live to God, when we were by nature dead in trespasses and sins; and to have the image of God in holiness and righteousness restored to us, which we lost by the Fall; and to be freed from a vile dishonourable slavery to Satan and our own lusts, and made the servants of God; and to be honoured so highly as to walk by the

²⁰⁷ **antinomian** — those that deny the proper role of the Law of God in the life of the Christian.

Spirit, and bring forth the fruits of the Spirit? And what is all this but holiness in heart and life?

“Conclude we, then, that holiness in this life is *absolutely necessary to salvation*, not only as a means to the end, but by a nobler kind of necessity: as part of the end itself. Though we are not saved *by* good works as procuring causes, yet we are saved *to* good works, as fruits and effects of saving grace ‘which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them’ (Eph 2:10). It is, indeed, one part of our salvation to be delivered from the bondage of the Covenant of Works;²⁰⁸ but the end of this is not that we may have liberty to sin (which is the worst of slavery), but that we may fulfill the royal law of liberty, and that ‘we should serve in newness of spirit, and not in the oldness of the letter’ (Rom 7:6). Yea, holiness in this life is such a part of our ‘salvation’ that it is a *necessary means* to make us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in heavenly light and Glory—for without holiness we can never see God (Heb 12:14), and are as unfit for His glorious presence as swine for the presence-chamber of an earthly king.

“The last thing to be noted in this direction is that holiness of heart and life is to be sought for earnestly *by faith* as a very necessary part of our ‘salvation.’ Great multitudes of ignorant people that live under the gospel harden their hearts in sin and ruin their souls forever by trusting on Christ for such an imaginary ‘salvation’ as consisteth not at all in holiness, but only in forgiveness of sin and deliverance from everlasting torments. They would be free from the *punishments* due to sin, but they love their lusts so well that they hate holiness and desire not to be saved from the *service* of sin. The way to oppose this pernicious²⁰⁹ delusion is not to deny, as some do, that trusting on Christ for salvation is a saving act of faith, but rather to show that none do or can trust on Christ for *true* ‘salvation’ except they trust on Him for holiness. Neither do they heartily desire true salvation if they do not desire to be made holy and righteous in their hearts and lives. If ever God and Christ give you ‘salvation,’ *holiness will be one part of it*; if Christ wash you not from the filth of your sins, you have no part with Him (Joh 13:8).

“What a strange kind of salvation do they desire that care not for holiness! They would be saved and yet be altogether dead in sin, aliens from the life of God, bereft of the image of God, deformed by the image of Satan, his slaves and vassals to their own filthy lusts, utterly unmeet for the enjoyment of God in Glory. Such a salvation as that was never purchased by the blood of Christ, and those that seek it abuse the grace of God in

²⁰⁸ **Covenant of Works** – God’s promise of death upon disobedience to his command and, by implication, life upon obedience (Gen 2:16-17). It was given to Adam, the representative of his posterity, whose failure was imputed to them. Thus death came upon all men (Rom 5:12-21) (see *The Covenants – of Works and of Grace*; available from Chapel Library).

²⁰⁹ **pernicious** – wicked, evil.

Christ and turn it into lasciviousness.²¹⁰ They would be saved by Christ and yet be *out* of Christ in a fleshly state; whereas God doth free none from condemnation but those that are *in* Christ, that walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit. Or else they would divide Christ, and take a part of His salvation and leave out the rest; but Christ is not divided (1Co 1:13). They would have their sins forgiven, not that they may walk with God in love, in time to come, but that they may practice their enmity against Him without any fear of punishment. But let them not be deceived, ‘God is not mocked’ (Gal 6:7). *They understand not what true salvation is*, neither were they ever yet thoroughly sensible of their lost estate, and of the great evil of sin; and that which they trust on Christ for is but an imagination of their own brains; and therefore their trusting is gross presumption.

“True gospel-faith maketh us come to Christ with a thirsty appetite that we may drink of living water, even of His sanctifying Spirit (Joh 7:37-38), and cry out earnestly to Him to save us, not only from hell, but from sin, saying, ‘Teach me to do thy will; for thou art my God: thy Spirit is good’ (Psa 143:10); ‘Turn thou me, and I shall be turned’ (Jer 31:18); ‘Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me’ (Psa 51:10). This is the way whereby the doctrine of salvation by grace doth necessitate us to holiness of life, by constraining us to seek for it by faith in Christ, as a *substantial part* of that ‘salvation’ which is freely given to us through Christ” (Walter Marshall,²¹¹ 1692).

The above is a much longer quotation than we usually make from others, but we could not abbreviate without losing much of its force. We have given it not only because it is one of the clearest and strongest statements we have met with, but because it will indicate that the doctrine we are advancing is no novel one of our own, but one that was much insisted upon by the Puritans. Alas, that so few today have any real Scriptural apprehension of what *salvation* really is; alas that many preachers are substituting an imaginary “salvation,” which is fatally deceiving the great majority of their hearers. Make no mistake upon this point, dear reader, we beg you: if your heart is yet unsanctified, you are still unsaved; and if you pant not after personal holiness, then you are without any real desire for *God’s* salvation.

²¹⁰ **lasciviousness** – “...unbridled lustful excesses...” (A. T. Robertson on this word in 1Pe 4:3).

²¹¹ **Walter Marshall** (1628-1680) – British churchman who was ejected as a Non-Conformist in 1662. Concerning his book from which our author quotes: “Marshall began to focus more on studying and preaching Christ. He realized that he had been trying to make personal righteousness the basis of his dealings with God and the ground of his peace. Consequently, he had not submitted to the righteousness of God in Jesus Christ. When he focused upon Christ, he found holiness, peace of conscience, and joy in the Holy Ghost. *The Gospel Mystery of Sanctification* was the fruit of that experience. Of this book, James Hervey stated that if he were banished to a desert island and could take only a Bible and two other books, Marshall’s classic would be one of them” (*Meet the Puritans*, Joel Beeke & Randall J. Pederson).

The salvation that Christ purchased for His people includes both justification and sanctification. The Lord Jesus saves not only from the guilt and penalty of sin, but from the power and pollution of it. Where there is genuine longing to be freed from the love of sin, there is a true desire for *His* salvation; but where there is no practical deliverance from the service of sin, then we are strangers to His saving grace. Christ came here to “Perform the mercy promised to our fathers, and to remember His holy covenant; the oath which He swore to our father Abraham, that He would grant unto us, that we being delivered out of the hand of our enemies might serve Him without fear, in holiness and righteousness before Him, all the days of our life” (Luk 1:72-75). It is by this we are to test or measure ourselves: are *we* serving Him “in holiness and righteousness”? If we are not, we have not been sanctified; and if we are unsanctified, we are none of His!

3b. Its Necessity, Part Two

In the first part of our treatment of the necessity of sanctification, it was shown that the making of a sinner holy is indispensable unto his salvation, yea, that sanctification is an integral part of salvation itself. One of the most serious defects in modern ministry is the ignoring of this basic fact. Of only too many present-day “converts” does it have to be said, “Ephraim is a cake not turned” (Hos 7:8)—browned underneath, unbaked on the top. Christ is set forth as a fire escape from hell, but not as the great Physician to deal with the malady²¹² of indwelling sin and [to] fit for heaven. Much is said upon how to obtain forgiveness of sins, but little is preached of how to be cleansed from its pollutions. The necessity for His atoning blood is set forth, but not the indispensability of experimental holiness. Consequently, thousands who mentally assent to the sufficiency of Christ’s sacrifice know nothing about heart purity.

Again, there is a woeful disproportion between the place that is given to faith and the emphasis which the Scriptures give to that obedience which flows from sanctification. It is not only true that “without faith it is impossible to please God” (Heb 1:6), but it is equally true that without holiness “no man shall see the Lord” (Heb 12:14). Not only are we told “in Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision, but a new creature” (Gal 6:15), but it is also written, “Circumcision is nothing, and uncircumcision is nothing, but the keeping of the commandments of God” (1Co 7:19). It is not for nothing that God has told us, “*Godliness* is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is, *and* of that which is to come” (1Ti 4:8). Not only is there in all the promises a particular respect unto personal, vital, and practical “godliness,” but it is that very godliness which, pre-eminently, gives the saint an especial interest in those promises.²¹³

²¹² **malady** – illness.

²¹³ **preeminently...promises** – the author’s wording here may mislead. Obedience evidences we have a share in the promises (1Jo 2:3) but is not the basis upon which this interest is given (Ti 3:5). Ultimately, our interest in the promises is all by grace

Alas, how many there are today who imagine that if they have “faith,” it is sure to be well with them at the end, even though they are *not* holy. Under the pretence of honouring faith, Satan, as an angel of light, has deceived, and is still deceiving multitudes of souls (2Co 11:14). But when their “faith” be examined and tested, what is it worth? Nothing at all so far as insuring an entrance into heaven is concerned; it is a powerless, lifeless, and fruitless thing! It is no better than that faith which the demons have (Jam 2:19). The faith of God’s elect is unto “the acknowledging of the truth which is after *godliness*” (Ti 1:1). Saving faith is a “most holy faith” (Jude 20): it is a faith that purifieth the heart (Act 15:9), it is a faith that worketh by love (Gal 5:6), it is a faith that overcometh the world (1Jo 5:4), it is a faith that bringeth forth all manner of good works (Heb 11). Let us now enter into detail, and show more specifically *wherein* lies the necessity for personal holiness.

Wherein Lies the Necessity of Holiness

1. Our personal holiness is required by the very nature of God.

Holiness is the excellence and honour of the divine character. God is called “rich in mercy” (Eph 2:4), but “glorious in holiness” (Exo 15:11); His mercy is His treasure, but holiness is His glory. He swears by this perfection: “Once have I sworn by my holiness” (Psa 89:35). Over thirty times is He called “The Holy One of Israel.” This is the superlative²¹⁴ perfection for which the angels in heaven and the spirits of just men made perfect do so much admire God, crying “Holy, holy, holy” (Isa 6:3; Rev 4:8). As gold, because it is the most excellent of the metals, is laid over inferior ones, so this divine excellency is laid upon all connected with Him: His Sabbath is “holy” (Exo 16:23), His sanctuary is “holy” (Exo 15:13), His name is “holy” (Psa 99:3), all His works are “holy” (Psa 145:17). Holiness is the perfection of all His glorious attributes: His power is holy power, His mercy is holy mercy, His wisdom is holy wisdom.

Now the ineffable purity of the divine nature is everywhere in the Scriptures made the fundamental reason for the necessity of holiness in us. God makes the holiness of His own nature the ground of His demand for holiness in His people: “For I am the LORD your God: ye shall therefore sanctify yourselves, and ye shall be holy; *for I am holy*” (Lev 11:44). The same fundamental principle is transferred to the gospel, “But as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation; because it is written, Be ye holy; *for I am holy*” (1Pe 1:15-16). Thus God plainly lets us know that His nature is such, and unless we be sanctified, there can be no intercourse²¹⁵ between Him

(Rom 11:5-6). We receive the promises by faith, not by works (Eph 2:8-10). The biblical emphasis on faith corresponds with grace and gives glory to God (Rom 4:14-16). “But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness” (Rom 4:5). Let the reader keep these truths in mind, for similar statements appear elsewhere in this work.

²¹⁴ **superlative** — supreme,

²¹⁵ **intercourse** — communication.

and us. “For I am the LORD that bringeth you up out of the land of Egypt, to be your God: ye shall *therefore* be holy, for I am holy” (Lev 11:45). Without personal holiness the relationship cannot be maintained that *He* should be *our* God and we should be His people.²¹⁶

God is “of purer eyes than to behold evil, and canst not look on iniquity” (Hab 1:13). Such is the infinite purity of His nature that God cannot take any pleasure in lawless rebels, filthy sinners, the workers of iniquity. Joshua told the people plainly that if they continued in their sins, they could not serve the Lord, “for he is an holy God” (24:19). All the service of unholy people toward such a God is utterly lost and thrown away, because it is entirely inconsistent with His nature to accept it. The Apostle Paul reasons in the same manner when he says, “Let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear: *for* our God is a consuming fire” (Heb 12:28-29). He lays his argument for the necessity of grace and holiness in the worship of God from the consideration of *the holiness of His nature*, which, as a consuming fire, will devour that which is unsuited unto and inconsistent with it.

He who resolveth not to be holy, must seek another god to worship and serve, for with the God of Scripture he will never find acceptance. The heathen of old realized this, and liking not to retain the knowledge of the true God in their hearts and minds (Rom 1:28), and resolving to give up themselves unto all filthiness with greediness, they stifled their notions of the divine Being and invented such “gods” to themselves as were unclean and wicked, that they might freely conform unto and serve *them* with satisfaction. God Himself declares that men of corrupt lives have some secret hopes that He is not holy: “Thou thoughtest that I was *altogether such an one as thyself*: but I will reprove thee” (Psa 50:21). Others, today, while professing to believe in God’s holiness, have such false ideas of His grace and mercy that they suppose He will accept them though they are unholy.

“Be ye holy, for I am holy.” Why? Because herein consists our conformity to God. We were originally created in the image and likeness of God, and that, for the substance of it, was *holiness*—therein consisted the privilege, blessedness, pre-eminence of man over all the lower creatures. Wherefore, without this conformity unto God, without the impress of His image and likeness upon the soul, we cannot stand in that relation unto God which was designed us in our creation. This we lost by the entrance of sin, and if there be not a way for us to acquire it again, we shall forever come short of the glory of God and the end²¹⁷ of our creation. Now this is done by our becoming holy, for therein consists the renovation of God’s image in us (Eph 4:22-24; cf. Col 3:10). It is utterly vain for

²¹⁶ All true believers will be sanctified, but Christ saves the ungodly—holiness is never the prerequisite to salvation, but is always a by-product of it.

²¹⁷ **end** – goal, purpose.

any man to expect an interest in God while he does not earnestly endeavour after conformity to Him.²¹⁸

To be sanctified is just as requisite²¹⁹ as to be justified. He that thinks to come to enjoyment of God without holiness, makes Him an unholy God, and puts the highest indignity imaginable upon Him. There is no other alternative: we must either leave our sins, or our God. We may as easily reconcile heaven and hell, as easily take away all difference between light and darkness, good and evil, as procure acceptance for unholy persons²²⁰ with God. While it be true that our interest in God is not built upon our holiness, it is equally true that we have none without it. Many have greatly erred in concluding that, because piety and obedience are not meritorious, they can get to heaven without them. The free grace of God towards sinners by Jesus Christ, by no means renders holiness needless and useless. Christ is not the minister of sin, but the Maintainer of God's glory. He has not purchased for His people security *in* sin, but salvation *from* sin.

According to our growth in likeness unto God, are our approaches unto Glory. Each day both writer and reader are drawing nearer the end of their earthly courses, and we do greatly deceive ourselves if we imagine that we are drawing nearer to heaven while following those courses which lead only to hell. We are woefully deluded if we suppose that we are journeying towards Glory, and yet are not growing in grace. The believer's glory, subsequently considered, will be his likeness to Christ (1Jo 3:2), and it is the very height of folly for any to think that they shall love hereafter what now they hate. There is no other way of growing in the likeness of God *but in holiness*; thereby alone are we "changed into the same image from glory to glory" (2Co 3:18)—that is, from one degree of glorious grace to another, until by one last great change shall issue all grace and holiness in eternal Glory.

But is not God ready to pardon and receive the greatest and vilest sinner who comes unto Him by Christ? Is not His mercy so great and His grace so free that He will do so apart from *any consideration* of worth or righteousness of their own? If so, why insist so much on the indispensability of holiness? This objection, though thousands of years old, is still made. If men must be holy, then carnal reasoners can see no need of grace; and they cannot see how God is gracious if men perish because they are unholy. Nothing seems more reasonable to carnal minds than that we may live in sin because grace has abounded. This is met by the apostle in Romans 6:1, where he subjoins the reasons why—notwithstanding the superaboundings of grace in Christ—there is an indispensable necessity why all believers should be holy. Without the necessity of holiness in us,

²¹⁸ **image of God** – if there is an aspect of the image of God retained even by fallen mankind outside of Christ (see James 3:9), then the author's discussion is, at least, not complete.

²¹⁹ **requisite** – required, necessary.

²²⁰ **unholy persons** – those who make a profession of faith, but who show themselves to be unregenerate by their lack of a generally holy life.

grace would be disgraced. Note how when He proclaimed His name “gracious and merciful,” the Lord at once added, “and will by no means clear the guilty” (Exo 34:6-7), i.e., those who go on in their sins without regard unto obedience.

2. Our personal holiness is required by the commands of God.

Not only is this so under the Covenant of Works, but the same is inseparably annexed under the Covenant of Grace.²²¹ No relaxation unto the duty of holiness is granted by the gospel, nor any indulgence unto the least sin. The gospel is no less holy than the Law, for both proceeded from the Holy One. And though provision be made for the pardon of a multitude of sins for the acceptance of the Christian’s imperfect obedience,²²² yet the standard of righteousness is not lowered—for there is no abatement given by the gospel unto any duty of holiness nor any license unto the least sin. The difference between those covenants is twofold: under that of works all the duties of holiness were required as our righteousness before God, that we might be justified thereby (Rom 10:5)—not so under grace, no allowance was made for the least degree of failure (Jam 2:10)—but now, through the mediation of Christ, justice and mercy are joined together.

Under the gospel-commands for universal holiness respect is required unto three things. First, unto the *authority* of Him Who gives them. Authority is that which obligates unto obedience: see Malachi 1:6. Now He Who commands us to be holy is our sovereign Lawgiver, with absolute right to prescribe that which He pleases, and therefore a non-compliance is a despising of the divine Legislator. To be under God’s command to be holy, and then not to sincerely and earnestly endeavour always and in all things so to be, is to reject His sovereign authority over us and to live in defiance of Him. No better than *that* is the state of everyone who does not make the pursuit of holiness his daily and chief concern. Forgetfulness of this, or failure to heed it as we ought, is the chief reason of our careless walking. Our great safeguard is to keep our hearts and minds under a sense of the sovereign authority of God in His commands.

Second, we must keep before our minds the *power* of Him Who commands us to be holy. “There is one lawgiver, who is able to save and to destroy” (Jam 4:12). God’s commanding authority is accompanied with such power that He will eternally reward the obedient and eternally punish the disobedient. The commands of God are accompanied

²²¹ **Covenant of Grace** – God’s gracious, eternal purpose of redemption, conceived before the creation of the world, first announced in Genesis 3:15, progressively revealed in history, accomplished in the Person and work of Jesus Christ, the benefit of which is applied to all that believe in Him.

²²² **acceptance...obedience** – not as any part of the righteousness by which we are justified; that is Christ’s alone (Phi 3:9). Rather, God is pleased with his imperfect redeemed people (Psa 149:4) and their flawed obedience (Heb 13:16), not because they meet the standard of His Law (1Jo 1:8), but by grace, by Christ: “Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, *acceptable to God by Jesus Christ*” (1Pe 2:5).

with promises of eternal bliss on the one hand, and of eternal misery on the other; and this will most certainly befall us according as we shall be found holy or unholy.

Herein is to be seen a further reason for the indispensable necessity of our being holy: if we are not, then a holy and all-powerful God will damn us. A due respect unto God's promises and threatenings is a principal part of spiritual liberty: "I am the Almighty God; walk before me, and be thou perfect" (Gen 17:1); the way to walk uprightly is to ever bear in mind that He Who requires it of us is Almighty God, under Whose eyes we are continually. If, then, we value our souls, let us seek grace to act accordingly.

Third, respect is to be had unto the infinite *wisdom and goodness* of God. In His commands God not only maintains His sovereign authority over us, but also exhibits His righteousness and love. His commands are not the arbitrary edicts of a capricious²²³ despot, but the wise decrees of One Who has *our good* at heart. His commands "are not grievous" (1Jo 5:3); they are not tyrannical restraints of our liberty, but are just, wholesome, highly beneficial. It is to our great advantage to comply with them; it is for our happiness, both now and hereafter, that we obey them. They are a heavy burden only unto those who desire to be the slaves of sin and Satan; they are easy and pleasant unto all who walk with God. Love for God carries with it a desire to please Him, and from Christ may be obtained that grace which will assist us thereto—but of this, more later, D.V.

3. Our personal holiness is required by the mediation of Christ.

One principal end of the design of God in sending His Son into the world was to recover us unto that state of holiness which we had lost: "For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil" (1Jo 3:8). Among the principal of the works of the devil was the infecting of our natures and persons with a principle of sin and enmity against God,²²⁴ and that evil work is not destroyed but by the introduction of a principle of holiness and obedience. The image of God in us was defaced by sin; the restoration of that image was one of the main purposes of Christ's mediation. Christ's great and ultimate design was to bring His people unto the enjoyment of God to His eternal Glory, and this can only be by grace and holiness, by which we are made "meet for the inheritance of the saints in light" (Col 1:12).

Now the exercise of Christ's mediation is discharged under His threefold office. As to His *priestly*, the immediate effects²²⁵ were the making of satisfaction and reconciliation,

²²³ **capricious** — erratic, impulsive, unpredictable.

²²⁴ **enmity against God** — consider: "But if our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost: In whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them" (2Co 4:3-4). See also John 12:31; 14:30; Ephesians 2:2; 6:12; 1 John 5:19.

²²⁵ **immediate effects** — consequences directly caused by an action.

but the mediate effects²²⁶ are our justification and sanctification: “Who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works” (Ti 2:14)—no *unholy* people, then, have any sure evidence of an interest in Christ’s sacrifice. As to His *prophetic* office, this consists in His revelation to us of God’s love and will: to make God known and to bring us into subjection unto Him. At the very beginning of His prophetic ministry we find Christ restoring the Law to its original purity—purging it from the corruptions of the Jews (Mat 5). As to His *kingly* office, He subdues our lusts and supplies power for obedience. It is by these things we are to test ourselves. To live in known and allowed sin, and yet expect to be saved by Christ, is the master deception of Satan.

From which of Christ’s offices do I expect advantage? Is it from His priestly? Then has His blood cleansed me? Have I been made holy thereby?²²⁷ Have I been redeemed out of the world by it? Am I by it dedicated to God and His service?

Is it from His prophetic office? Then have I effectually learned of Him to “deny ungodliness and worldly lusts, and to live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world”? (Ti 2:12). Has He instructed me unto *sincerity* in all my ways, in all my dealings with God and men?

Is it from His kingly office? Then does He *actually* rule in me and over me? Has He delivered me from the power of Satan and caused me to take *His* yoke upon me? Has His sceptre broken the dominion of sin in me? Am I a loyal subject of His kingdom? If not, I have no rightful claim to a personal interest in His sacrifice. Christ died to procure holiness, not to secure an indulgence for unholiness.

4. *Our personal holiness is required in order to the glory of Christ.*

If we are indeed His disciples, He has bought us with a price, and we are “not our own,” but His, and that to glorify Him in soul and body because they are His (1Co 6:19-20). He died for us that we should not henceforth live unto ourselves, but unto Him Who redeemed us at such a fearful cost. How, then, are we to do this? *In our holiness* consists the principal part of that revenue of honour which the Lord Jesus requires and expects from His disciples in this world. Nothings glorifies Him so much as our obedience; nothing is a greater grief and reproach to Him than our disobedience. We are to witness before the world unto the holiness of His life, the heavenliness of His doctrine, the preciousness of His death—by a daily walk which “shows forth *his* praises” (1Pe 2:9). This is absolutely necessary if we are to glorify Him in this scene of His rejection.

²²⁶ **mediate effects** — consequences indirectly caused by an action. Since we are “...justified by his blood...” (Rom 5:9), how does the author say justification is a mediate effect or Christ’s Priesthood? Perhaps because he sees we are not considered to be justified until we believe, though Christ fully atoned for our sins long before (Gal 2:16).

²²⁷ **made holy thereby** — see Romans 6 (especially verse 6).

Nothing short of the *life* of Christ is our *example*; this is what the Christian is called to “follow.” It is the life of Christ which it is his duty to express in his own, and he who takes up Christianity on any other terms woefully deceives his soul. No more effectual reproach can be cast upon the blessed name of the Lord Jesus than for His professing people to follow the lusts of the flesh, be conformed to this world, and heed the behests of Satan. We can only bear witness for the Saviour as we make His doctrine our rule, His glory our concern, His example our practice. Christ is honoured not by wordy expressions, but by a holy conversation.²²⁸ Nothing has done more to bring the gospel of Christ into reproach than the wicked lives of those who bear His name. If I am not living a holy and obedient life, this shows that I am not “for” Christ, but *against* Him. (N.B.²²⁹ Much in this chapter is a condensation of John Owen on the same subject, Volume 3 of his works). ❧

From The Doctrine of Sanctification, paperback available in print from Chapel Library.

Appendices

About Studies in the Scriptures

Arthur W. Pink (1886-1952) wrote and published his monthly 28 page expository digest, *Studies in the Scriptures*, from 1922 to 1953. He mailed it worldwide by paid subscription to whomever desired the deeper truths of God. Each issue contained continuing serialized articles on six to eight subjects. When one subject was “completed” to the author’s satisfaction, another subject series began in its place in the next issue. In total, the 380 issues comprise a treasure of immense proportions.

By God’s grace, Chapel Library republishes the *Studies* beginning with the year 1934, available for download worldwide, and mailing three issues each quarter by free subscription in North America. We also print many books and booklets gleaned from articles

²²⁸ **conversation** – manner of conduct; behavior; lifestyle.

²²⁹ **N.B.** – L. *nota bene*: note well; take particular note.

in the *Studies*. These may be ordered in print in North America, or downloaded from our website worldwide without charge:

Studies: www.chapellibrary.org/studies

Other literature: www.chapellibrary.org/literature/title-catalog

Today the various subjects are being gathered together by topic, and republished as eBooks and in paperbacks by several sources. *Chapel Library* offers over 170 Pink titles, mostly tracts and booklets. The following paperbacks are in print at this time, several are available as free eBooks at our website, all others are being converted to eBooks.

- The Sovereignty of God	176 pages
- Comfort for Christians	79 pages
- Profiting from the Word	96 pages
- Seven Sayings of the Savior	94 pages
- Spiritual Union and Communion	175 pages
- The Attributes of God	105 pages
- The Doctrine of Human Depravity	241 pages
- The Doctrine of Revelation	214 pages
- 1 John – An Exposition, Part 1	190 pages
- 1 John – An Exposition, Part 2	173 pages
- The Holy Spirit	196 pages

Biography of A.W. Pink

by Erroll Hulse

Concerning Calvinism²³⁰ and Arminianism²³¹ during the first half of the Twentieth Century, a most interesting case study is the experience of Arthur W. Pink. He was a

²³⁰ **Calvinism** – the doctrinal system developed from the teachings of the French-born Swiss Reformer John Calvin (1509-1664), holding that the Bible teaches the supreme authority of the Scriptures, the sovereignty of God, predestination, and the “doctrines of grace”; these doctrines were the response of the Synod of Dort (1618-19) to the Arminians’ remonstrance (protest) and are commonly known by the acronym TULIP.

²³¹ **Arminianism** – (from Jacobus Arminius, 1560-1609, Dutch theologian) the doctrinal system that rejects the Reformers’ understanding of predestination, teaching instead that God’s predestination of individuals was based on His foreknowledge of their accepting or rejecting Christ by their own free will.

preacher and writer of outstanding talent who ministered in Britain, America, and Australia. When he died in 1952 in isolation on the Island of Lewis in north eastern Scotland, he was hardly known outside a small list of subscribers to his magazine, *Studies in the Scriptures*. Yet, by the 1970s, his books were in wide demand and his name was widely known among publishers and ministers. In fact, for that period it would be difficult to find a reformed author whose books were more widely read.

The preaching ministry of A. W. Pink had been remarkably blessed in the USA, but it was in Australia that he seemed to reach the apex of his public ministry, and there in particular that his preaching ministry reached great heights. He was then faced with accreditation by the Baptist Union and was rejected on account of his Calvinistic views. He then ministered in a Baptist church of Strict Baptist pedigree. There he came unstuck since they esteemed him an Arminian! A considerable group, however, appreciated Pink, recognised his worth, and seceded from that Strict Baptist Church to form a new church of 27 members. Then suddenly, in 1934, Pink resigned and returned to Britain. It is widely held that one rejection is enough to cripple a minister for life, but two in quick succession can destroy a pastor completely. So it proved for Arthur Pink. He never again found meaningful entrance into the ministry, though he tried his utmost. He sought openings in both the UK and the USA without success. He became increasingly isolated. He ended his days as an evangelical recluse in the Island of Stornoway off the coast of Scotland. It was rumoured that not more than ten souls attended his funeral.

There is much that we can learn from the life of A. W. Pink. Firstly, we will trace out his early life in broad outline. Secondly, we will describe his experience in Australia, and trace out the adverse effects of this on his life. Thirdly, we will the impact of his writing ministry.

1. Early Life

Arthur Pink was born in Nottingham, England, in 1886. His parents were godly. They lived by the Bible and kept the Lord's Day holy. Arthur was the first of three children brought up in the fear and admonition of the Lord. To the grief of their parents, all three children drifted into lives of unbelief. Worse was to come: Arthur embraced *Theosophy*, an esoteric cult that claimed powers of the occult! "Lucifer" was the name of the leading theosophy magazine. A natural feature of Arthur's character was wholeheartedness, and he entered theosophy with zeal. A leadership role was offered him, which meant that he would visit India. At the same time a friend who was an opera singer, noted that Arthur possessed a fine baritone voice; he urged him to study for a career in opera. Then suddenly on a night during 1908, Arthur was converted. His first action was to preach the Gospel to the theosophist group.

Simultaneous with Pink's conversion was a call to the Christian ministry. But the colleges were in the hands of liberals bent on the destruction of the Scriptures. Arthur,

however, heard of the Moody Bible Institute, which had been founded by D. L. Moody²³² in 1889. In 1910, aged 24, Pink left for Chicago to begin a two-year course. His time at Moody lasted only six weeks, however. He decided that he was wasting his time, and that he should enter directly into a pastorate—and his professors agreed! He was not disgruntled, but rather frustrated, that the teaching was pitched at such a primary level that it did nothing for him.

During 1910, he began in his first pastorate in Silverton, Colorado, a mining camp in the San Juan Mountains. We possess little detail of this period, but we know that from Silverton, Pink moved to Los Angeles. He was always a hard worker, and this is illustrated by the fact that at one point in Oakland he was engaged in tent evangelism six nights a week for eighteen weeks!

From Los Angeles, he moved to Kentucky. It was here that he met and married Vera E. Russell. There could not have been a better gift from heaven. Vera was entirely committed to the Lord. She was hard working, gifted, intelligent, and persevering. She died just ten years after Arthur's decease on the island of Stornoway.

The next move was to Spartanburg, South Carolina, from 1917 to 1920. This church building consisted of a small and frail wooden structure, while he and Vera lived in a small wooden house standing on wooden columns. Heating was inadequate, and in the freezing winter it was like an ice box.

It was during this time Pink began writing books. There were two of significance: one with the title *Divine Inspiration of the Bible*, and the second *The Sovereignty of God*, the foreword of which is dated June 1918. It was this book that was later taken up by The Banner of Truth publishers. The first edition, according to I. C. Herendeen, his first publisher at that time, was only 500 copies, and it was a struggle to sell that number. When the book came to Banner, it was edited by Iain Murray and vastly improved. It became one of the most popular of The Banner of Truth paperbacks. By 1980, 92,000 copies had sold.

After about a year at Spartanburg, Pink almost came to grief. He felt a strong conviction to give up the ministry and devote himself to writing only, and at one point was disconsolate. Vera wrote to a friend saying that her husband was even thinking of leaving the ministry and going into business, to make money for the Kingdom as a better way of serving God. In 1920, Arthur resigned the pastorate at Spartanburg. He and Vera moved and settled at Swengel, Pennsylvania, in order to be near the publisher I. C. Herendeen.

In the middle of July, 1920, he left to take a series of meetings in California. Large crowds gathered and numbers were saved. At one point 1,200 gathered to hear the Gospel. Other crusades and conferences followed; it was evident that Pink was eminently

²³² **D. L. Moody** (1837-1899) – American evangelist and publisher who founded the Moody Church, Northfield School and Mount Hermon School in Massachusetts (now the Northfield Mount Hermon School), the Moody Bible Institute, and Moody Publishers.

suiting to this kind of ministry. Looking back over his life, it is apparent that he experienced more blessing in the itinerant ministry than he did in a total of twelve years in pastoring churches. This had to do with his temperament; he preferred being in his study to visiting.

In 1921, Arthur and Vera were back in Pennsylvania. The monthly digest, the *Studies in the Scriptures*, first appeared in 1922. It ran continuously without interruption for 32 years, until Arthur's death in 1952. Initially, this was a 24 page magazine, with four to six articles as instalments in a series. To write expository material at a high standard at this rate every month is a tremendous testimony to his insight into the Scriptures, and to the Lord's blessing and enabling. All his articles had to be written by hand and finished for the printer at least two months before the date of publication. *Studies in the Scriptures* had about 1,000 circulation at the beginning, but for most of its existence the subscription level hovered at about 500. The financial side was always precarious, with only just enough to cover printing costs from one month to the next. Pink corresponded with some of his subscribers; eventually this formed his pastoral work. Throughout he was assisted by his very hard working wife, who acted as secretary. They never had a family, always lived very humbly, and managed always to make ends meet. This was made possible through a modest inheritance left to him by his parents and through gifts that he received from his readers.

During 1923, Arthur fell into a deep depression, which turned out to be a nervous breakdown. At this juncture a young couple that had been greatly blessed by Pink's ministry came to the rescue, and Arthur was nursed through a period of several months enforced rest, which brought him back to normal health.

In 1924, a major new direction came by way of letters of invitation from a publisher in Sydney, Australia. Before departing for Australia, no less than four months preparation had to be made for the *Studies*. On his way to Australia, Pink engaged in more Bible conference preaching in Colorado, then in Oakland, California, and also San Francisco—from where he and Vera took ship across the Pacific to Sydney.

2. *Pink's Experience in Australia*

The Pinks spent a total of three and half years in Australia. These times were for them the best, but also turned out to be the worst. Upon arrival Arthur had more invitations than he possibly fill. Initially his ministry in Australia was a great success. Crowds gathered; churches were filled; believers were revived; and souls were brought to the Saviour.

Attendance swelled in every place he preached. In the first year in Australia Arthur preached 250 times. He would often work until 2:00 in the morning to keep *Studies in the Scriptures* going. The Pinks truly must have felt that at last they had found the place of permanent fulfilment. There was an evident power in his ministry. One mature believer declared that he drew people "like a magnet," and that he preached the "whole counsel of God's Word," and was capable of preaching a sermon "from every word of the text."

This period proved to be one of great joy. Pink was now 40 years old. He was preaching almost daily for well over an hour. He would get home at 10:00 PM and then work until 2:00 AM. He wrote, “never before during our 16 years in the ministry, have we experienced such blessing and joy in our souls, such liberty of utterance, and such an encouraging response as we have done in this highly favoured portion of Christ’s vineyard.”²³³

We can be sure that a thrilling and powerful soul-saving ministry will arouse the fury of Satan. And so it proved to be in this case when that old serpent, the devil, mounted a cunning counterattack. The Baptist Union leaders were fundamentally opposed to Calvinism. These leaders invited Arthur Pink to read a paper on “Human Responsibility.” Sadly, Pink did not realise that this was a plot to demote him in the eyes of the public—and in his sincere earnestness he fell into the trap. Instead of declining this invitation, he presented the paper and then answered questions for over an hour. The result of this was that the BU of New South Wales published a statement that they agreed unanimously *not* to endorse his ministry. What they really meant (for they did not themselves clarify any doctrine) is that they did not agree with Pink’s Reformed doctrine. They were fundamentally Arminian. The effect of all this was that invitations dried up, and Pink’s wider effective ministry in Australia was drastically reduced.

It was at this juncture that one of three Strict and Particular Baptist Churches invited Pink to become its pastor. This church was known as the Belvoir Street Church. Here Pink was as busy as he had ever been in his life. He had preached 300 times in the year ending 1926. In addition to preaching three times a week at Belvoir Street, he preached in three different places in Sydney each week to an average of 200 at each meeting. He still managed to maintain *Studies in the Scriptures* by burning midnight oil.

Trouble however was in store. The early part of the Twentieth Century was a time of lack of clarity in doctrine. One of the evidences of this was confusion over Calvinism, Arminianism, and hyper-Calvinism.²³⁴ Many churches polarized. The Baptist Union was Arminian, and the Strict and Particular Baptists tended to be hyper-Calvinist. This proved to be the case at Belvoir Street. Until about May 1927, the Pinks believed that they had found a permanent church home.

3. *Impact of Pink’s Writing Ministry*

If history had progressed normally, Arthur Pink would have been forgotten. There are several leaders in each generation who are well known, but it is unlikely that their names will be remembered for very long. When Arthur Pink died, he was known to a

²³³ *The Life of Arthur W. Pink*, by Iain H. Murray, The Banner of Truth Trust, p 49

²³⁴ **hyper-Calvinism** – the doctrinal error that holds men need not evangelize, since God will save His elect children with or without the means of preaching the Word. This represents only one side of biblical truth; the other is that God is pleased to use human instruments as means to His work, and the preaching of the Word is uniquely marked out for this purpose (2Ti 4:2; 2Ti 3:16; Mat 28:19).

small circle of readers—about 500—who read his monthly periodical *Studies in the Scriptures*, which he had faithfully produced with the help of his wife Vera for 31 years. Yet, after his decease, as his writings were collected and published as books, his name became very well known in the English-speaking evangelical world. During the 1960s and '70s, there was a dearth of reliable expository writing; Pink's writings filled an important need. His expositions are God-centred, theologically compelling, and reliable—as well as practical and experimental. That was precisely what was needed during a period of spiritual drought. Publishers discovered the value of his writings. The outcome was dramatic.

For instance, Baker Book House published twenty-two different titles by Pink, with a combined total sales by 1980 of 350,000. By the same date just three books (*Sovereignty of God*, *Life of Elijah*, and *Profiting from the Word*) totaled 211,000. Yet as contemporary reformed authors have multiplied, so the demand for Pink's books has lessened.

We must remember that with the dawning of the twentieth century, the mainline denominations had already suffered extensive losses to higher criticism and modernism. Such was the advance of modernism in the late nineteenth century and through the first half of the twentieth century, most Bible colleges and seminaries were lost to an agenda of unbelief and anti-Christianity. Instead of producing preacher/pastors for the churches, men were sent out who emptied the churches. The most striking example is Methodism. The aggregate membership in Methodism grew to be the highest of the non-conformist churches. Yet this denomination has been virtually annihilated by modernism.

The writings of Pink provided not only food for the spiritually hungry, but as Iain Murray asserts, "Pink has been immensely important in reviving and stimulating doctrinal reading at the popular level. The same can be said of few other authors of the twentieth century."²³⁵

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²³⁵ *ibid.*

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